

major part of the harvest. The present shortage of priests and the demand for them in the Forces prevents a picked number being devoted exclusively to such a work of evangelization. But if every religious house undertook to preach throughout a specified radius round the house it ought to be possible to cover the whole of England with priests who would not have to forsake their primary work. A few hours every week would almost suffice if they all shared the task. Moreover for their helpers they could use all the lay folk already well prepared by Catholic action such as the Y.C.W., and the existence of the Tertiary should not be forgotten in this context.

The fire of the Spirit of God's love should drive Christ's apostles into the open. Only thus can we lay the foundations for a Christian social order—a simple answer to Christ's words, 'Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as you shall find call to the marriage.' Preachers must thus precede Christ himself, not to speak of the Christian order of things. Only thus can religion begin to enter into politics.

PRAYER AND POLITICS (I)¹

NOBODY wants to live in a world that is blind and insane; and if that is what we are heading for, then we had better try to do something about it. Aldous Huxley makes this very plain in his latest book, *Grey Eminence*. One of the main points he makes there is this: that a world totally without prayer would be a world 'totally blind and insane.' His actual phrase is a 'totally unmystical world'; but I am going to keep to the simpler and less misunderstood word 'prayer,' because people sometimes think that mysticism means either a tendency to swoon away at odd moments, or else a sort of permanent woolly-headedness. I am going to use the word 'prayer,' but I don't mean just 'asking for things,' and as I am going to define it, it will agree with what Huxley has in mind. A world totally without prayer would be a world totally blind and insane. 'Where there is no vision the people perish'; and Huxley's judgment of our own world is that we are dangerously far advanced into the darkness.

Now, the first thing to notice about this is that it is not an odd or uncommon view. It is not only Huxley's view; it is the Christian view. It is also the view of all the great religious teachers of the world; and more than that, learned men of all kinds are telling us that this society of ours, the modern Western world, is the only civilisation in the whole of the world's history which has *not* held

¹ A series of Broadcast Talks, by courtesy of the B.B.C. and *The Listener*.

that view and based its life upon it. If we imagine ourselves as having to give an account of our society to the rest of humanity, we might imagine our judges saying to us: 'Yes, you've done mighty things and good things; you've mastered Nature; you've gained wealth and power; you've learnt how to make more things more quickly and more cheaply than we ever could; you live in greater comfort and can travel at far greater speed; your science has given great gifts to humanity. But you've forgotten the 'one thing necessary'; you've forgotten that being is more important than doing. What's the use of being able to travel at breathless speed if you don't know where you want to go to, or why? What's the good of conquering the air if you can't organise your conquest for the good of humanity rather than its harm? Science can only tell you *how* to do things; it can't tell you what you ought to do, still less what you ought to be. You've gained enormously in knowledge, and therefore in power; but you've lost your vision; and "where there is no vision the people perish."' Now, if this is true—if it is true that we have lost the one thing that matters most, the thing on which everything else depends, if it is true that already we in Europe, in England, are dangerously far advanced into the darkness, dangerously near total blindness and insanity—then obviously we have got to do something about it, and do it quickly. There is no time to lose.

Now, what is this vision? Why is it regarded as of such immense importance by everybody except ourselves? And what, in any case, has it got to do with prayer? Well, take some examples. We all know the difference between knowing things and only knowing about them. We may learn a lot about some very lovely and lovable person; but that does not enable us to say we know him; on the contrary, we say we want to know him. And if we do get to know him intimately, and love him, then we acquire a new kind of knowledge, the knowledge that begets love and is in turn begotten by love. This is the deepest and most exciting kind of knowledge, because it enlarges not our minds only, but our whole personality. And what is true of persons is true also of things—of Nature, of animals, flowers, trees: it is one thing to know about them and quite another to have seen them, gazed at them, and loved them. This direct loving knowledge is an example of what we mean, in general, by 'vision.'

As we grow up, most of us lose this power of seeing things. At school our minds are cluttered up with a lot of facts about things; and then we have to struggle for a living, using things, and even persons, simply as means for the doing of our job. And if we get into the way of using things simply as means, we never stop to look

at them, and so we never really see them. But poets, artists, saints, all in different ways do keep their power of seeing things as they really are; and so they are always falling in love with things, and life for them is a constant delight. Children have it too; and we have to learn from them. 'Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter the kingdom of God.' Few of us ever manage to be childlike; we only succeed in being childish.

Now, there is one thing you can notice specially about little children, as about saints: all the things that come their way they treat as equally real, equally part of the great family of creation. You find them having long talks with puppies, flowers, dolls, human beings, all with the same gravity. They are much wiser than we. Even though we look long and lovingly at things, we shall lose our power of vision and perish unless we see them all, together, as a family in God and God in them. Things will not yield up their deepest reality to us unless we do this; without this sense of God we touch only the fringe of reality, and even that we may easily spoil. To love Nature tends to make you selfish and shallow unless it is set in the love of humanity: you may love humanity, but that will not prevent you from being cruel to men and women, unless your love for humanity is set in the love of God. 'Is not man's heart an abyss?' asked St. Augustine, 'a deep so profound as to be hidden even from him in whom it is?' Religion answers 'Yes'; and teaches that only by the Infinite can the abyss be filled, so that we must be ready to sacrifice everything, if need be, for this 'one thing necessary,' this 'pearl of great price,' the vision of God. It is when this vision is lacking that the people perish. Only when we have found God, say the men of prayer, will our humanity be fulfilled; and only then will our eyes be fully opened to the things of this world; only then shall we love them fully, and without fear of turning their gold into the dross of self-love and self-glory; only then, loving humanity truly, shall we be able to attempt the building of a world fit for humanity. I am not saying of course—and I would stress this very strongly, in case everything I am going to say should be misunderstood—that we should seek God *in order* to build a good and happy world; that would be the exact opposite of what we are here for. I am only saying that we cannot as a matter of fact expect to build a good world unless we do in the first place seek God. Political changes cannot help us, Huxley insists, unless many people set out to change *themselves* by the 'only known method which really works'—the method of the men of prayer. As long as there is no vision, the people perish. The longer we remain content with our loss of vision and do nothing about it, the further we advance into the darkness,

the further we advance towards total blindness and insanity and the extinction of our humanity.

Does all this seem very remote from what we usually mean by prayer? There was once a pious old lady who had a strange habit of bowing the knee whenever the devil was mentioned; and if anyone rebuked her she always replied: 'My dear, politeness costs nothing, and you never know where you may find yourself.' We sometimes think of prayer in those terms: a way of guarding against the possible anger of God, a sort of religious fire-insurance. If that is our whole idea of prayer, it is a very crude one. Or we think of prayer simply as a way of getting things we want, and that is not very noble either; it is like trying to marry God for His money. We must indeed stand in awe of God, and in fear of sin: we should be very silly if we did not. The frightening vastness of the universe is His footstool, and His love is a burning and consuming fire. We have to ask for what we need, for we deny our nature if we refuse to admit that we are His creatures, dependent on Him as children are dependent on their parents. But prayer is, above all, not so much an action as a state of being: from our point of view we should ask first, not what it does *for* us, but what it does *to* us. The wise men of the world tell us, not so much that without prayer we shall fail to get what we want, or get what we don't want, but that without prayer we shall fail to be what we want to be, shall fail to be real men. We shall be blind and insane. We shall be only half, or less than half, alive.

'I am come,' said our Lord, 'that they may have life.' Again and again in the gospels we find this same offering of life. The world had lost its power of vision and was perishing; but in Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The darkness—that darkness into which we are so far advanced—did not comprehend it, and still does not comprehend it; and still the light is there, shining, if we have eyes to see. You remember how two disciples followed Him and said to Him, 'Master, where dwellest thou?' And he said to them, 'Come and see.' And they came, and saw where He abode, and they tarried with Him. To a sad and troubled world, a world which asks despairingly, 'Where is peace? Where is truth? Where are justice and love and unity?' God still replies simply, Come and see. But He cannot coerce His free creatures: He calls to them. He does not destroy the nature of His handiwork; it is left to us to do that. If we want to see, we must make the journey. It is a frightening thing, this pilgrim's progress, even though the end is home; it means leaving the props and cushions that make life easy; and comfort makes cowards of us all. Yet heroic ventures, too, have

their power over us; and it is a heroic thing to launch out into the infinite deep. Well, then, if we would help to heal and save our world, this is the burden of what we have been saying so far: we must seek health and saving for ourselves; and if we seek that, we must set out upon this journey. It should hearten us to reflect on the witness of those who have set out before us and reached the goal; that at the end there are a peace and a joy that surpass understanding as they defy expression.

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Some people think that if they can swoon with delight at the sight of a buttercup they are somehow in tune with the Infinite; they may be, but they are not thereby men of prayer. Some people think that if the singing of a hymn or the recital of a prayer fills them with a warm cosy feeling, they are men of prayer; they are mistaken. Some people think that prayer, at least as we find it in the saints, is something spooky, a question of odd and morbid experiences: but it isn't. Some people think that being a man of prayer means being a dreamer—the sort of man who always leaves his umbrella in the train, or forgets to take off his boots when he goes to bed; they too are mistaken. Men of prayer are hard-bitten realists. They say, in effect, this: God is what is most real and true and good and lovely; so much so that everything else if viewed apart from Him, seems unimportant and shallow. We know what we have to do that He may show Himself to us; and we are going to do it; and nothing under the sun is going to stop us.

'I am sure,' said St. Paul, 'that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, neither things present nor things to come, neither height nor depth nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the charity of God.' The artist and the lover—and most of us are one or the other, if not both—see beauty, and love it and feel compelled to serve it. The man of prayer sees perfection, if only as in a glass darkly; and nothing will prevent him from serving that, to the end of his days and the last drop of his blood.

We should not be shy of the expression 'union with God.' You hear people talking of a household as a 'united family'; those unfashionable stories whose characters are presumed to live happy ever after, end by the removal of all obstacles to the happy union of the young lovers. In real life, as we know, the real and complete union of lovers is a thing that takes a lifetime to achieve. Young people sometimes suppose that if each thinks the other perfect, and

they like being together, there is nothing further to be done, nothing will ever come between them. They live and learn. We are made up of body and spirit; we live a many-levelled life; and that two people should perfectly chime together on all those levels—body, mind, heart and will—is not something that just happens; it is something that has to be brought about gradually by the two of them, with much labour and often with pain. But it can be done; and when you find a man and a woman, who for a long time have loved each other deeply and truly, and have learned to fulfil and complete one another at every level of life, then of them you can say truly that they are two in one flesh: together they make one thing, they have achieved union.

The man of prayer longs for union with God; and he too, so far as the matter is in his hands, has to labour to achieve it. The Christian believes that, in the words of one of the saints, God took upon Himself our humanity that He might raise us to His divinity: he believes that through Christ he may receive life and power to undertake his immense task without fear—without fear of being mistaken and going after strange gods, and without fear of failing for want of strength. 'I can do all things,' said St. Paul, 'in Him who strengthens me.' Well, how must we set about the task?

To fit ourselves for any strenuous way of life, there are two things we have to do. We must concentrate upon it, schooling ourselves to sacrifice interests which would clash with it, and forming our characters so as to be able to meet the demands it will put upon us. Secondly, we must train our minds, so as to be masters of the art we want to practise: we shall need to be humble enough to learn, concentrated enough to be able to study, single-minded enough not to be always distracted. The more strenuous or heroic the life, the more intensive our training in these two ways will have to be. The life of prayer is the most strenuous of all; and the training for it the most intensive. It is not a pleasant hobby or a childish pastime: all the masters assure us of that; it is something we all ought to do, all can do, all must do if we want to be really alive; but while all are called, few are chosen; and few are chosen because few of us want to be chosen. Comfort makes cowards of us all.

You may have heard of the young man who called one day on a famous explorer, and said: 'I hear you are advertising for a companion for your next expedition.' 'Quite right,' said the explorer. 'Well,' said the young man, 'I suppose you want a man of courage and determination and resource?' 'Yes, certainly.' 'A man you can trust to face any danger, however appalling, without flinching; any crisis, however unnerving, without a tremor; a man who will

carry on, through thick and thin, no matter what the obstacles, till the goal is reached?' 'Yes,' said the explorer, 'that's exactly the sort of man I do want.' 'Well,' said the young man, 'I'm not going, for one.'

The voyage undertaken by the men of prayer is arduous and exacting; but the Christian feels strong, not in his own power and resources, but in the strength of Christ. That is the meaning of Christian life. The aim of the Christian men of prayer is not, and never has been, to substitute the humanity of Christ for the Godhead as the object of worship. Christ said of Himself: 'I am the Way'; the Church in its liturgy prays through Christ to God; the Christian journey is summed up in the old phrase, 'through the humanity to the divinity.' We are told first to put on Christ; and then, living in Him and in His power, we shall find the fulfilment of our lives in achieving union with the Godhead—living *with* Christ in God. That is the path which all the Christian saints have followed; and it is that that has given them their simple humility in spite of their glory; given them their homeliness, their love and care for the small things of the world, their practical good sense, their immense energy in serving humanity. It is that, too, that gives them their courage. For they say, as St. Paul said: 'I can do all things in Him who strengthens me.'

Let us look at the first of the two things we have to do: the forming of our characters. A man who devotes his whole life to curing disease cannot also devote his whole life to music. There is no reason why he should not love music: there is every reason why he should; but he must be prepared to give up a great deal of enjoyment for the sake of his calling. He must be prepared often to miss some concert he was longing to hear because his services are needed. Where the man of prayer is concerned, all the good things of life are like music to the doctor: he must be prepared to give up his enjoyment of them, if need be, for the better service of God. Some men of prayer have indeed rejected the world altogether as evil; but that is not the way of those who follow Christ, who came to save and serve the world. On the contrary, the more they love God, the more they love the world He made and redeemed. But their love is not the selfish grasping thing it is for so many of us; it is not possessive. Living as they do, as though in eternity to which all things are equally present, they are not dismayed by the passing of earthly things, the restless waves of time. Living as they do in God, in whom are all things, they are not dismayed by temporal loss or separation. Sorrow, yes, in full measure; but not despair. Love overflowing; but not greed. We, whose motive is so often selfish-

ness, tire ourselves out with agitation and anxiety. Just as we can be roused to a ridiculous fury if the breakfast coffee is cold, so we find ourselves in a fever of fear lest what we want should be denied us or taken from us; and our wants increase with the years and hang about our necks, and make life ever less of a delight and more of a burden. Too often we love things only for the pleasure they can give us, treating them as means so that our vision fades; and so we are like misers, never at peace. These others love better than we; they do not grasp. So there is always in them a deep undercurrent of Joy. For in them is fulfilled the prayer of a great living poet:

Teach me to care, and not to care;
'Teach me to sit still.'

Learning to sit still, to care and not to care—the exact opposite of what the world teaches us—is the first of the things we have to do. Then there is the adventure of the mind itself. Here, too, we have to learn the very opposite of what the world teaches; for the world thinks of truth as something to be grasped and possessed, and wrenched to our uses, but the wise tell us it is something to be wooed in silence, something to be possessed *by*, if we are worthy, and something which, if we are worthy, may make use of us. The depths of reality and truth are revealed to us, the abyss of the human heart is filled, only by waiting in stillness on the voice and presence of God; learning indeed to see Him and reverence Him in all things, but also withdrawing ourselves at times from every thought and activity, and laying bare our minds and hearts to his touch. That is an absolute necessity; that every single day we should devote some time, if only ten minutes, to this quiet seeking for the Infinite, putting other cares and interests aside, and pondering over Him as He has revealed Himself to us, and raising our hearts to Him. Prayer is asking, yes; it is living our cares and loves in God's sight and offering them to Him, yes; but it is more than that. It is the relentless effort, in spite of difficulty and failure and fatigue, to come closer to God, to fill ourselves with His presence, and so gradually to come to know Him and be with Him in a silence like the silent communion of lovers. Then He in His turn can speak and enlighten our darkness; can come, and tarry with us; until at the end we are one with Him. We are in eternity though we walk the roads of England. We live in His life and act in His power. We are fully, completely, because divinely, alive; because we can say as St. Paul said: 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.'

GERALD VANN, O.P.