

The season of Easter is, of course, the season for reaffirming the traditional radicalism and materialism of the christian gospel: radicalism, because the death and resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate statement that we come to more abundant life not by living a bit longer or a bit better but by a total change, by a rebirth, by going through death to life; materialism, because of the traditional insistence on the historical and bodily character of the event.

The radicalism of the gospels derives from the uncompromising demands already made in the Old Testament. Answering the summons of Yahweh means a total and unconditional rejection of the gods, a total conversion, a complete break with the past; there is no room for half-measures and compromises. This, at least, is the message of the prophets: what we actually find in the Old Testament is the very complex story of the impact of this revolutionary doctrine and practice on long-established ways of feeling and acting. The gods are not banished so easily, and even when they are gone there remains the temptation to make Yahweh himself into a god. There remains the tendency to domesticate Yahweh, to provide him with a place in the present order of things instead of listening to him as the constant call to renewal, to breaking with the present and creating a new world. Yahweh is continually betrayed by those who find their security in the present, the wealthy and the successful; it is the poor, the *anawim*, through whom Yahweh operates, through whom he creates the future. It would of course be wrong to identify this teaching with the marxist account of the revolutionary mission of the proletariat. For one thing this would imply a crude, non-historical fundamentalism, for another there are obvious differences. It is the power of the organised working class that is to achieve the socialist revolution; it is the weakness of the *anawim* that makes their victory a dramatic manifestation of the power of God. Nevertheless there is a clear association between the two doctrines.

The prophets' distrust of rich men, of priests and of all who have grown powerful in the established order becomes in the New Testament an antithesis between the gospel and the powers of the World. The story of the temptation in the desert, with which we open the liturgy of Lent, represents the impossibility of compromise between the two. Those who preach the gospel will be hated, persecuted and killed by the World. They will be regarded as subversives and extremists, and with good reason; the gospel threatens the foundations of the World, the domination and subservience upon which a society depends for its stability. The gospel seeks out and challenges this domination even when it disguises itself in the forms of tolerance and peace and consensus and even liberation.

Easter reminds us that if we love, if we love affectively, we will be

killed by the World, and it reminds us that it is just through this conflict and this apparent destruction that a new humanity comes into being.

The materialism of the gospel lies in its concentration on the historical and bodily presence of Jesus. Death and resurrection is not just an abstract doctrine, a pattern of possibility. Easter is not saying in an idealist way: This is how things might be. It is saying: A certain number of years ago this really happened and therefore we are now changed. The world is not what it was, it now has a concrete Hope, not just an aspiration or a recommendation but a guaranteed future, a future which in Christ is already realised. The actual risen body of Christ is our future, already mysteriously present to us. It is this future Christ, already active in our present, that we proclaim in the sacraments. The Church, indeed, is nothing but the celebration of the real concrete bodily presence of the future Christ to our world: it is, in the familiar words of Vatican 11, sacrament of the future unity of mankind.

The materialism of christianity is not the mechanistic materialism that Marx criticised, which refuses to see the world except in the perspective of the engineer, for which all values, all spontaneity, all freedom is illusory. It is a materialism that begins not with dead machines but with living human bodies. In proclaiming the resurrection we announce that the meaning of human life, the aim of history, lies not in some immaterial ideal world but in the real world of human bodies. Not, of course, in the world as it now it: it is our mission to subvert and radically transform our current world to make of it a new world, to create, through the power of the Spirit of love, new and liberated forms of bodiliness 'for building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ'.

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