

ROOTS AND UNITY

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WHEN a man is granted a vision he is always, at least at first, worth listening to. He may later obscure the vision by his own petty fanaticism, but so long as the sight is granted him and so long as he is the receiver rather than the generator he will have something of value to say. Men should therefore bear him with patience and with an open mind, and they will surely learn from him. The danger of brushing visionaries aside comes in particular to those who consider themselves to be so entirely possessed of the truth, that they have nothing more of value to learn—and there are numbers of such complacents.

These remarks are occasioned by two books which have indeed been received with an open mind by many, but which run the risk of being set on one side by those who would most benefit by them, namely the fervent Christian who looks once again for a united Christendom. The two 'visionaries' are very different in character. The first is an Englishwoman with no pronounced religion, but with a cultural tradition founded on the solid ground of the ancient universities and with a passion for science. This is Mrs Jacquetta Hawkes, whose wide and thoroughly scientific knowledge of archeology has been perceived by the single eye of the visionary and who thus brings a new unity to scientific thought. This unity is to be found in her book *A Land*,¹ which in the course of a year has become a best-seller. She has been able to stand back from her own native land and regard it from its earliest possible origin, then a place of massive unchartered rock, and she sees the history of England from that primeval time as a single uninterrupted development; she sees her land throughout the billions of years as a whole and as a unit.

The other writer, on the contrary, was a French Jewess, an impassioned lover of Christ with a strong dislike of present-day Judaism and Christianity; she wrote in exile from her land shortly before she died in England in 1943. Part of her vision is a vivid realisation of the power science now has and how all religion has

1 *A Land*, by Jacquetta Hawkes. (Cressett Press; 21s. First Impression May, 1951.)

tended to capitulate to its 'certainties'.² Her visions are many rather than one; she does not stand outside her country nor found herself on the land. She writes as from within the maelstrom of industrialised France in the midst of its ruin. So her visions have to be taken individually, sight by sight.

But both authors, in a way few realise today, are conscious of the uprootedness of modern life and the extreme peril into which we have fallen. Both are vividly aware of the past as forming the present and of the present danger of destroying the past. 'For several centuries now', writes Simone Weil, 'men of the white race have everywhere destroyed the past, stupidly, blindly, both at home and abroad' (p. 49); and Mrs Hawkes laments the break with nature and with nature's gifts from time immemorial until the industrial revolution. Both need to be adjusted to the full Christian teaching so as to make their visions vital and effective, and to give to Christians a new and dynamic answer to the challenge of Communism.

Mrs Hawkes differs not from her fellow scientists in their materialism; she takes it for granted that the highest human performance is the present result of a continuous process of evolution beginning from the rocks themselves; that the stream of consciousness proceeds uninterruptedly from the first living organism until its arrival at Proust or Mozart. In this Mrs Hawkes may have something in common with Marx, who indeed, as Miss Weil points out, so felt the need for rooting in the past 'that he was determined to make this tradition go back to the remotest times by making class-war the one and only principle by which to explain history' (*Need for Roots*, p. 49). But we need the sort of vision of the past that is to be found in these two books to be able to re-form all this modern materialism into a truly whole (spirit-with-matter), single Christian human life. It should be remembered that St Thomas not only christianised Aristotle,³ but completed the work of the Fathers of the Church by adjusting Plato's vision, which could so easily open the way to materialism, to revealed truth. It may be that these two women between them will bring such new light on the modern dispute between

² cf. pp. 229-236 of *The Need for Roots*, by Simone Weil. (Routledge & Kegan Paul; 18s.)

Mr T. S. Eliot in his Preface to this book pointed out some of the strange anomalies in the character of this 'prophetess'; but in spite of these he is rightly aware of her great importance as a thinker.

³ It is perhaps one of her inconsistencies that Miss Weil retains as great a dislike for Aristotle and St Thomas as she does for the Roman habit of mind in general.

materialist science and religion of the spirit as to serve to adjust the godless worship of so many moderns with the faith of Christ. Simone Weil's constant warning against the dangers of materialism should help to make the adjustment, and in reading her *Need for Roots* one is made aware of the possibility of 'capturing' the materialists on their own ground and revealing to them the spirit, not separated from the object of their study but within it; giving it form and reality. It would surely not be difficult to 'capture' Mrs Hawkes; *A Land* seems to be in the most proximate preparedness for receiving the spark of life, the spirit enlivening the total mass of material from the beginning of creation.

Mrs Hawkes shows us in the unimaginable terms of hundreds of millions of years the creation of Britain. She discerns this act of making the island not as a single primordial gesture of a playful god, but as an uninterrupted process of coming-to-be, an act of which the beginnings are hidden beneath the horizons of time, but which can be traced right up to the present moment. This act in Christian thought is called the governance of the universe which differs not from the act of creation except in so far as the First Cause continues to cause. But Mrs Hawkes considers this act of preservation and development as wholly immanent, the inner vitality of being taking the helm and steering from rock to protoplasm and on to primeval life and so to cultured man. This immanent, throbbing force weaves the pattern of the island with its inhabitants according to some dark unconscious exemplar. Of course the action is not proper to Britain; Britain however is the author's own land and lying on her plot of soil she feels the pulsing rhythm of this force that makes the world and makes this part of the world called Britain, a microcosm of the total earth. Perhaps her own impression is pantheistic in tone; but that is inevitable for one who does not see the transcendent God. He it is who guides this uninterrupted development; having made 'all thing', as Mother Julian would say, in whole and in part, he works always through nature without being identified with it.

The French writer does not feel the pulse of her land so much as the rhythm of her people; as she writes so movingly about 'compassion' for one's country (pp. 162-5), she is yet wholly a city woman. But the city is built on the land, and her book needs the balance of this other one, *A Land*, for the reader to guess at what the true reality of a Christian land might be. Simone Weil is not

consistent; her almost total separation of the peasant from the industrial worker shows a lack of the vision of a country as a whole growing from true roots in the soil. But she shows us how 'to love her (i.e. to love France, one's country) as something which, being earthly, can be destroyed and is the more precious on that account'.

It is however the unity of Mrs Hawkes's vision which is of such importance. We need not bother too much at first about the over-simplification which leads her to assume a direct and immanent development from rocks to life. At least Isaiah encourages us to look to the rock from which we are hewn, and the raised stone has always symbolised a relation between life and death not only in the English graveyard but with the Pharaoh's monoliths and Jacob himself with his anointed stone marking the holy place. Mrs Hawkes watches Henry Moore discovering the living human form in the rock that is made of millions of primeval living cells. And we are reminded of Moses finding the source of life in the rock he struck and of Christ the Rock become 'the head of the corner' and of Peter who is the visible expression and living foundation of the rock-built Church. In the country every crag and boulder is personified with some spiritual significance among the local inhabitants; and the rebuilding of the ruined country is to be made with stones that will shape our further destiny (cf. also *Need for Roots*, pp. 69-79). Christian and natural symbolism here seem to play the same tune as archeological fact.

In Mrs Hawkes's view, of course, man appears very minute and Christianity only a rather brighter patch on the vast canvas. But she does show how man and his true religion fit into his surroundings, and how until only two or three hundred years ago he co-operated with the immanent action of the living rock and the land. The Christian religion indeed helped man to enter into this movement of nature, to make it fertile and productive, and yet always increasing its treasure and its beauty. The same pattern may be found in the religions of Britain before Christ, when the mother-god and the dying and rising god were worshipped; this shows us how Mother Nature lives and how this life was perfected and not destroyed by Christ. But it also reveals how modern industrialised man has suddenly struck a mortal blow at this living, inner rhythm of the creating and generating land, of how man has become incestuous towards his mother-land. There was a

time when even gold, which as money has become one of the greatest instruments for digging up roots, shone in men's mind with the light of the sun-god's life; as also it was carried to Bethlehem not to make Joseph rich, but to honour the child-God.

We must face quite frankly and cheerfully the fact that Christ was a man among hundreds upon hundreds of millions of men only a minority of whom have even heard his name, that Christ was a man who lived for one generation amid a ceaseless river of generations stretching back into the dim past as well as moving forward to the present. Miss Weil accuses Christians of an inferiority complex regarding science; and certainly statistics and quantitative figures exercise a strange fascination which sometimes seems to make the Christian nervous. Yet the Christian holds the key to qualities, one glimmer of which can outshine an infinite quantity of any material. These figures, which have fascinated the Augustines of every age, are only of value in so far as they help to reveal the shape of things, the pattern which the vast quantity of material things traces across the huge expanse of history.

One simple adjustment may make the Word of God shine forth resplendently from the rocks and stones of Skiddaw, Cader Idris, the Grampians, and the soft wave of the chalk Downs. If Mrs Hawkes sees consciousness and sensation developing entirely from within the mass of matter—the necessity for protection produced the shell, the demand for sight produced the eye—we need not cavil. The Creator is not only transcendent, like some puppeteer producing movement in his doll below. He is immanent, too, and his immanence is revealed in finality. Mrs Hawkes more than once mentions the 'unconscious wisdom' revealed in the stupendously beautiful process of evolution. Wisdom indeed it is, and unconscious in these physical creatures, but mirrored or accepted from the infinitely conscious wisdom of the Word in whom all things are made. The adjustment is that of finality or purpose; the desire for sight, for protective shells or antlers cannot exist consciously in the creature itself; but it can become a seeing or a protected creature because the divine purpose within it so desires; these new developments occur when they fit the pattern of finality proceeding ultimately not from the creature but from the continuous source of the creature's being, the mind of God.

St Thomas challenged those who denied the governance of the world, and thought that everything happened by chance by saying:

'We observe that in nature things happen always or nearly always for the best', which is really Mrs Hawkes's point. But he goes on, 'This would not be the case unless some sort of providence directed nature towards good as an end . . . and since it belongs to the best to produce the best, it is not fitting that the supreme goodness of God should produce things without giving them their perfection, that is, bringing them to their end.' (I, 103, 1.) You cannot plot a process without becoming aware of its end or purpose. That is what Mrs Hawkes calls 'the unconscious wisdom' in the development of creatures, this is what supplies the unity to all creation, the unity that *A Land* reveals with such brilliance.

And as all things come out of the Word in the mind of God, so they are destined to proceed into the words in their united pattern in the mind of men. Mrs Hawkes expresses that vivid awareness of the reality of the past so important in our 'need for roots' in terms of man's memory. The scientific discoveries of the primeval past awaken memories; so that man, delving into the soil and splitting rocks to discover the fossils hidden in their darkness, digs deeply into the dark recesses of his memory, for he has emerged from amidst all those strange fishes and mammals. This is stated also by Christian scholastic thought in terms of the mind becoming all things. And man's mind has come to full consciousness in the rhythm of life lived through night and day, summer and winter, rain, sunshine and snow. Man's mind holds within it the seeds of all real things. His intellect begins, no doubt, as an 'empty slate', but his intellect is the high point of consciousness in a being whose roots pierce into the heart of the living rock. It is part of the break with nature that has made us think of the mind of man as that of a spirit settling down to watch at a distance the cinematograph of the drama of the universe. Man is a part of the material universe, the salt of the sea is in his tears and in his blood, the heat of the earth in his heart; and in this way his memory can be said to retain ripples of the pulsing movements of creation.

Finality, then, is the secret that will overcome the tragic separation between religion and the scientific life which has become natural to man. We can begin to detect a purpose in the rhythm which began as the earth circled the sun and rock saw life appear, then once more conquered in fossil—birth, maturity, death. This pulse developed until the Christian Church established Ash Wednesday and man was reminded that he had been dust of

rock and would return to dust and fossil, and the Church consecrated ground so that his dead body might be laid to rest in his own homely soil with the stone at his head.

Miss Weil suggests in this context that science can be given something of the mystery cycle that will link it with religion; in other words, that the movements discerned by the scientists have a purpose that is linked with life. 'Everything should be centred around the wonderful cycle whereby solar energy, poured down into plants, is retained in them by the action of chlorophyll, becomes concentrated in seeds and fruit, enters into Man in the form of food and drink, passes into his muscles and spends itself in preparing the soil' (*Need for Roots*, p. 83)—that at least for the peasants.

It should be possible to show how all this is to be interpreted in the person and work of Christ, 'the Rock' from whom all have drunk (cf. I Cor. 10, 4). This symbolic interpretation of the foundations of man's full life, the supernatural life which permeates and elevates his natural life and brings it to the Centre, this interpretation will illuminate even further the facts about stone, about the rise and fall of life, about the movement and rhythm of birth and death. The main finality-root in man is his imaging of Christ, and he must become more and more aware of the Christ within him, the Man of all ages, of all tribes and nations, and in whom all things find their continuity and inner cohesion.

When Mrs Hawkes laments the defacing of the land by man and sees no future for the rusting heaps of tin or for the barren slag heaps and rubbish pits, we may weep with her. These waste lands reveal the break that man has made from his Mother Nature, pretending at last that he is no longer a child and can fend for himself, independently of his surroundings from which he draws his life. But these tears will reassure us and show us where the storming of the citadel of science will be successful. Mrs Hawkes begins so bravely with her millions upon millions of years, but is finally vanquished by the devastation of a few generations, and the future hundreds of years of rusting metal. This reveals that it is not the number of years that count, but the quality of human experience. Scripture tells us that it is 'one day above a thousand' that counts and that the highest quality of all is to be found in the One in whom all things are made. We may see the whole vast unity of the universe in one important moment which matters

everything to us. The moment is that of thirty years which we strive always to relive, thirty years which culminate in one death for all and one resurrection.

Now the importance of christianising these 'visions' lies in this, that they provide a unity of life which is in tune with modern man without being ignorant of his uprooted state of life, and, being aware of this, offering to man a return to wholeness. It seems that Christians have for long been too wholly absorbed by the differences of Christianities. It is easy for us to see the evils of being uprooted from the supernatural life of the true Church. The trouble is that there have arisen these other Christian churches each claiming to be the true establishment of Christ and seeking to provide soil and to root man in this supernatural earth. And for the most part this is uppermost in the minds of those who are now seeking the unity of Christians, that they all may be one in Christ. The break with supernatural religion has left us with a secularised world so rigorously depicted by Simone Weil. The crews of these vessels have been trying to drag the individuals floundering in the sea of secularism on to the deck of their own religion. And until recently they were all struggling against each other in the storm clutching at the same individuals.

What for so long has been overlooked is that there has been this break with nature herself. The theology that regarded nature as wholly corrupt assisted in widening the fissure that had begun to open centuries before. The progress in technical knowledge and skill in such an atmosphere soon led to the final break with nature, which we can call the uprooting of man from the soil of the universe. And where nature is denied and trampled on, supernatural has nothing to perfect. Of course, grace can perfect a man in slavery or in the dehumanised conditions of the chain store and mass-production. But you must feed the starving man before you preach to him, yet the Gospels have been preached vigorously and cacophonously to men withering away because they had been uprooted. The work of the apostolate tragically was soon facing an unreal problem. It was not so much the disaster of men being drawn away from true Christianity into false, of being uprooted from God, as that of men drawn away *en masse* from any Christianity because they had been uprooted from their own land and from their very nature.

Here lay the success of Communism. It recognised the true

state of affairs. It accepted the false and unnatural life of men and offered them a salvation within that isolated industrial life that they were leading. It offered an *ersatz* loaf, a scientific, evolutionised bread to those starving men. It provided an artificial soil and a sense of wholeness and unity which seemed to bring back the moisture of humanity to dehydrated man.

These books approach the problem of dehydrated man on the natural level, aware of the break that has been made with nature. The fact that they do not recognise the fullness of the life of Christ in the Church must not allow us to overlook the bread they offer. They are not Marxist, and they recognise the reality of what the Marxist offers. They should help all Christians to approach the appalling devastation of this uprooting with open eyes. And if then they give to *A Land* and *man's Needs for Roots* the true finality of the Word, in whom all things exist, made flesh, they will find a soil fit for the growing of their own life.

In short, if those who are concerned about divided Christendom and the need for a 'united front' against Communism would concentrate all their thought and action on doing what Christ would have us do to modern man—I was thirsty and you gave me to drink, I was uprooted and you planted me again in my land—then it will be found that mankind is also rooted in God and the one true Church will have a new opportunity to flourish.



THE DEATH OF A PROTESTANT

GRAF HELMUTH JAMES VON MOLTKE

[The following letter dates from eight years ago. Graf Helmuth James von Moltke, whose home had become a focal centre of resistance to the then German Government, was arrested early in 1944. The letter, to his wife, was written in prison in the course of the one day intervening between the Extreme Penalty as demanded by the Public Prosecutor and Sentence of Death as finally pronounced. Translated by kind permission from *H. J. von Moltke, Letzte Briefe* (Henssel Verlag, Berlin) by R. G. L. Barret.]

MY DEAR—To begin with the ending: at about three o'clock the sentence was read out: Moltke, death and deprivation of estate; Father Delp, the Jesuit, the same; Reisert and Speer, ditto; Fugger, three years' penal servitude. The