

first time by a stenographer at the meeting. If in consequence they lack the considered finish of the pen, they preserve something of the life and spontaneity of the tongue, particularly as the audience were large and enthusiastic. We regret the absence of Mr. Richard O'Sullivan's address and of Fr. Agnellus Andrew's shorter but very lively speech which brought the week to a close. The latter was almost wholly concerned with the special and important occasion of the Rugby week, the former we hope to include in a future issue of BLACKFRIARS.

The SUPPLEMENT appears also as a pamphlet, published by the Dacre Press, price Sixpence.

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### THE EFFECT OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION ON CIVILISATION<sup>1</sup>

EVERYTHING Christian begins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and ends in glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. And the essential point in all religious recovery is a realisation that God is all in all, and that our heart, our strength and our faith in the future come from that controlling absorbing, essential fact of the reality of God.

When Eric Gill, the sculptor, was asked to make a sculpture for the League of Nations at Geneva, he went to the beginning of Genesis for his text, and he made a design like that of Michaelangelo in the Sistine Chapel in Rome—God touching man to life; 'In the image of God He made man'—and above it he put a line from a religious poet of the last century, Gerard Hopkins: 'Thou mastering me, God.' Eric Gill, the artist, thought he could choose no better text for the League of Nations; the League should be made to realise that without the inspiration of that essential text and that line from the poet, their councils would be in vain, as, alas, so far in vain they have proved.

The old and true Christian attitude is that God is the measure of all things; God is the measure of man. This so-called humanitarian age which is now reaching its close has said that man is the measure of all things; and, alas, unless Christian ideals can prevent it, we are moving into an age when the State will shape the measure of all things, and, if I may say so, that measure will be a mess.

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<sup>1</sup> The substance of a speech given at the inaugural meeting of the Rugby Christian Life Week, May 9th, 1943

My subject here is the effect of the Christian religion on civilisation. It is in our social, economic, family and national life that we wish to see the effect of Christian teaching, Christian life and the Christian religion. And we want to see its fruits.

There can be no doubt whatsoever that we are at this moment at a crisis in civilisation. It belongs to youth to decide what path they will choose. It belongs to those who are middle-aged and old, by the perfection of their work, by their conversation and their example, to show those who are coming what path to choose. But we are at the parting of the ways. At long last the road forks into opposite directions, the writing is on the wall and, as far as human expectation is concerned, there is no doubt whatever that we are going to pass into a purely secular society and that Christianity is going to be an antiquated religion. Every movement, every trend would show us that Christianity has now come to its close—so far as human expectation is concerned. And there are many admirable Christians who will not face this fact; they who are like the Holy Women of Jerusalem who, while their Master is being led to crucifixion, stand at the wayside bewailing, and have to hear from him those words: 'If they do this in the green wood, what shall be done in the dry?'

The writing is on the wall. As you know so well our civilisation so far has been a Christian civilisation; it has been a unique civilisation; it has outshone every civilisation the world has known; there is nothing comparable to it, and that civilisation was formed, nurtured and brought to its beauty by the Christian religion. That is not a vague philosophical thought; it means that whereas in history, where everything seemed against the success of the Christian faith in a world of paganism, that world was changed in effect by Christianity; it was transfigured. Can that happen again? It happened once—it took a long time but gradually the whole pattern of society came into the perfection of Christian thought and Christian principles, the conception of God as the Almighty Father, and man made in his image. Man was thus raised above the level of the brutes; man with responsibility, freedom and comradeship, and with the capacity to do his work thoroughly and live every moment of his life fully and richly in the presence of his Father, with the co-operation of the Son and the assistance of the Holy Ghost. He was conscious of immense responsibility, with the realisation that on his acts grave issues depended, and that in the future his life would be judged on a glorious ideal, on how far he stood up to that ideal in his gift of himself to humanity, in his love of his neighbour and

work for the poor, in the perfection of his work, in the purity of his mind and the integrity of his purpose, whether he had made great decisions or mean decisions, whether he had been sincere or dishonest, whether heart and soul he had lived his life fully for God.

And in that world pattern there grew up a conception of law, a deep appreciation of the richness of beauty and truth, of knowledge and wisdom; the universities were founded; hospitals were established, giving scope to the expression of man's tenderness for individuals. This was a great, an heroic pattern of society governed by the principle of giving, governed by the height of self-sacrifice, and this was the Christian civilisation or society. Then, slowly, other conceptions intruded themselves. Slowly a different pattern began to take its place, and by the end of the last century it was found that man had taken upon himself to be the master of his own life and of his own fate. He had once more begun to dream of the power of riches, of human prosperity and of a heaven, a paradise upon earth, and to feel that if only all restrictions were taken away, and if competition were open to everyone, if every man had a chance for wealth, a much more perfect society would emerge. This introduced the profit motive in the place of that of sacrifice, brought in individualism instead of comradeship, and this conception of society failed so quickly that we saw signs of its decay in the last war. The error of that view of life was showing itself in the running away from individualism and competition into a society which was no longer a society of responsible persons but a Leviathan, a society of the State, a society scientific and impersonal, in which there was no longer a basis for personal and economic freedom, a society which could perhaps give a measure of security, but a security to be purchased only at the cost of one's own inner and outward freedom.

And now, as I have said, the writing is on the wall. In two parts of the world we see systems which, in their efforts to cure the ills they see around them, wish to have a society governed entirely, even to its least item, by a totalitarian government, by a rigid rule of conformity. We are seeing now the circle come full wheel. Now we are struggling in the net we are crying out for our freedom. Totalitarianism has expressed itself in two forms; in the democratic societies in the removal of one freedom after another by State control, a conception of society in which the State is becoming the universal manager of what a distinguished writer has called the 'managerial' society in which we all 'clock-in' and the bureaucrats are our masters. It is against that trend which looks, as I say

from human expectations, inevitable, we here in Rugby as in other places must say 'This shall not be.' Christian men and women should not stand by the wayside bewailing and doing nothing. I believe it is in the power of every individual to give his mind to prevent this and to work towards a different form of society which can carry on the greatest traditions of the past and transform them in accordance with new needs, new hopes and new powers, to build a new society which may still be formed on Christian principles.

On such Christian principles we must insist that the State is there to produce more and more persons who are free in conscience to serve the highest; that the State is ultimately the servant, and the individual should not be subject to it, but it should minister to him; it should nevertheless have the dignity and the authority of a free community of men and it should possess a moral sense. And its real authority should be realised as descending upon it from him who is the author of all power and authority, the principle of all goodness, God himself. Again there must be an equal justice, a common code of morals, not this constant change which by spreading relativity in words is destroying the societies of the world. This conception of society which believes that power can take the place of justice, that murder can be called right, that the robbing of others can be called exemplary, must give way to that justice which comes from the natural order and the eternal law of God, that law to which we all owe obedience. The moral foundation of society should be built once more on duty, on love, on sacrifice. I said to you that in spite of all our failings in past ages, we have never lost completely the conception that the higher a man goes the greater his responsibility and the more is he bound to give of his best. Alas, that many should look upon a career as something only in which they can be successful, and that there should be so much envy of those who are in higher positions, when, on the contrary, we ought to say to ourselves: 'Am I fit for that, could I keep the selfishness within me in check? Would I not abuse those talents and powers if they were given to me? Am I worthy to hold such a position of responsibility with perhaps thousands in my care, where I could do damage to so many?' Our temptation should be rather to go into a quiet corner where we can do some suitable work and feel thankful that great responsibility does not rest upon us, instead of being envious and thinking that the sooner we get into a job like that, the better for us. Such ambitions ruin society; no society can exist on terms like that. We should ask ourselves: 'Who am

I with my poor talents, if God calls me to responsibility, to an office, if God puts others in my care and charge?' I should go down, rather, on my knees and ask for grace to be made worthy of that high duty. Then we should have begun to fulfil something of the Christian ideal; then we should be beginning to return to a Christian society. But when envy comes into it we are just letting these modern, disintegrating movements go on, and it is there, I think myself, that the crisis can be found particularly emphasised in society at the present moment. We meet power politics, the growing power of the State, and against it a demand for freedom. But if our demand is simply for freedom, we will never produce a society which will be harmonious; but on the other hand, are we just to become cogs in the machine? The answer perhaps lies exactly where I have said—in that conception which still survives in this country, the spirit of sacrifice. This stands out now in the present war. I have recently spent some weeks with the Merchant Navy, and I have seen them in every discomfort, uncomplaining, without a thought of their own ease, without a grumble, just carrying on—in self-sacrificing devotion. And this is the spirit that we should find all through a Christian society.

I do not then feel that failure is inevitable; it is not so; God has promised that he will be with us always. Therefore I can have no dread, no fear that Christianity can ever be ultimately defeated, but I do fear that we may have to pass through much tribulation to hand on the inheritance to our children. In this we must rise to the standard of Christian dignity. God will not fail us, for he has promised that the Church will endure for ever. But we ourselves may be unworthy members who will talk of service and not practice it. If we have not strength in our own hearts to begin with our own family life, in our business concerns, in our work, to learn just what the Christian ideal is and then put it into practice, we are not true followers of Christ. We see in the fact of motherhood a perfect example of what that ideal is. There we see the secret of life, self-sacrifice and devotion, labour and suffering for another, issuing in joy. And that joy can likewise come to us through the splendour of personal responsibility, in thoroughness in all our work, working for others, putting aside the importance of success and going down on our knees and thanking God that we have been allowed to cooperate in this restoration and rebuilding of a truly Christian society.

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