

forgiven for reviving new hopes: of great service to the Church, and, through a Church united in loyalty, to a nation re-united and re-integrated to its own principles and its own past.

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## IN PRAISE OF STANDARDS

SOME men profess to look first at examples, some at the exemplar. The difference of air about the two has often been commented on; that they get along together for the most part as well as they do is due to the fact that the former do admit the existence of an exemplar, and that the latter do concern themselves with the production and improvement of the examples. The first standpoint has been subtly expressed in the lines

*Though Plato no doubt was a corker, yet our philosophees  
Is that we must be ready for dinner when dinner is ready for we;*

whereas the others would be chiefly concerned to adapt the dinner hour to their own needs. They will still be able to go amicably in to dinner because both will at least agree that dinner is desirable. They will agree on the existence of standards, wherever they are to be found, and a world to be conformed to them and indeed demanding their embodiment. And to that extent, a wide one, they present us with the classical ideal. For the classical world, now or two thousand years ago, is a world which recognises standards, standards of thought and action, to be discovered, recognised, accepted, and imposed both on individual and communal life. That ideal is not particularly non-Christian, not particularly Christian; it transcends these categories. And like other ideas which transcend categories, it is realised as the same yet very differently in

each. The armies of Constantine and Julian, they too had standards, the cross and the eagles, and the demands made on each by the ideals thus represented were very different yet in a way the same. Courage and skill in the art of war were called for from both, and it is not for nothing that the virtue bore the same name in each case, yet the courage of the cross is not the courage of the eagle. Pagan men can cling to standards, and Christian men can cling to a standard, but with the difference of standards there is a difference of clinging: embraces are characterised by what the arms enfold.

The difference between the pagan standards and the Christian ones has been much emphasised by Mr. C. N. Cochrane in a study of thought and action from Augustus to Augustine.<sup>1</sup> With great learning and understanding he penetrates deeply into the history and literature both of those Roman centuries which with their Hellenic predecessors have come to be called classical *par excellence*, as well as of the first centuries of the Church's life. From this analysis there emerges a definite picture of the classical ideal, itself diversely filled in by its different exponents. But whether they approached more to the Hellenic model in giving a primacy to speculation, or to the more authentically Roman character in emphasising the need for order and the dynamic reign of law, they agreed together on the natural self-dependence of man and on his ability to find his perfection through reliance on his own mind exercised on the world he found about and within him. That was the standard to which they clung. Its characteristically Roman expression was given to us in literature by Cicero and Vergil, most obviously by the latter, since Cicero yielded, as the Roman banner must, to the logical primacy of Hellenism, the primacy of

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<sup>1</sup> *Christianity and Classical Culture; A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine.* By Charles Norris Cochrane. (Clarendon Press; 30s.)

thought over action, and while neglecting the importance of the life of speculation yet presented his philosophy in speculative attire. Vergil by adopting the medium of poetry not only upheld the standard of law where it could be seen by all, but expressed persuasively and creatively the matchless drive of the Roman race to impose order on a world of relative chaos, a propensity seen throughout their history, at first among the classes of the city, later over the Mediterranean, and even the wider world. His own verse with its incomparable mastery of the balance of stresses and its firm confident progress through the swirling currents of sound, not only suggests the prodigal riches which an organising genius can wring from a multitude which is properly reduced to order, not in any steam-hammering way, but proportionately to their rational nature; it also pulses and surges and flows with the blood so that the whole man is caught up into its movement and driven to act. It was thus that he was such an able abettor of the Augustan regeneration of the Roman world. 'The result is to produce such force and effectiveness that, in the refulgent light of the Vergilian revelation, the commonplaces of Cicero assume the proportion of cosmic truths. For it enables the poet to offer a consecration to the principles of classical humanism, which is thus revealed, not as a step to religion, but as religion itself.'

It is necessary to cast an eye over the outline of the principles thus variously expressed. Man is considered as a type which is both exemplified in individuals and as also demanding further and more complete exemplification and realisation in them. The author notes that it makes very little difference in the end whether the typic form be considered as subsisting in independence of its examples, or as existing only in them. To a large extent this is true, though the members of the two schools will engage themselves with the sample cases and individuals around them in a widely differing spirit and method. The

basically important fact, nevertheless, is that they both admit an objective type or standard demanding progressive realization; a standard moreover which is identified with the truth of what is. Man's creative power is fore-measured by a rule or law of being, and the persistent acknowledgement of this in the Helleno-Roman world has all the force which a thorough and genuine acceptance of reality must ever have. Man, then, is accepted as he is found to be, and he is seen to have certain natural desires which imply the demands of his nature for development and perfection to be reached along lines which that nature itself maps out before they are reflected on, or when reflected on, traversed. Such desires are those for self-preservation and self-reproduction, for social intercourse and apprehension of truth. Such ends are the right ends for the nature which is made to be perfected by them, and rights to them are thus given with that nature, and must be accepted by the mind which accepts and desires to assert the existence of the human individual. The goodness and badness of modes of conduct will follow as these ways of acting conform or not to the realisation of such ends. There is thus a form of perfection to be imposed on a relatively formless material, and for success in this undertaking imposed by the fact of existence, there are needed, first, a vision of the idea or standard, and, second, an incessant seeking to en flesh it. If the Greeks laid greater stress on the former, and the Romans on the latter, yet the Greek world teemed with political activity, and the Roman presents us with sustained effort after the ideal of social order, which effort is an attempt at communal fixity of attention and contemplation scarcely to be paralleled.

Was such a view of man's task on earth faulty at heart? Did it involve absurdity? And did Christianity, the revelation of God's infallible truth, therefore come to destroy the classical ideal? Mr. Cochrane's *idée maîtresse* is that this was so, and in answering the last question thus,

he consorts most strangely with Gibbon, who, to adopt Professor Arnold Toynbee's reading of his mind (*Christianity and Civilization*, Burge Memorial Lecture, 1940), rejoiced in the ideal of human self-perfectibility by knowledge, an ideal supposedly recaptured in his eighteenth century, and supposedly declining from the Antonines onward under the corrupting influence of the Christian acid. Whereas Mr. Cochrane, seeing indeed the same picture, sheds no tears over the reversal. To us this interpretation spoils as a whole a book which taken in its several parts is both keen-sighted and absorbing. For the classical ideal of perfection through knowledge is not in fact shown convincingly to be self-contradictory, and Christianity is not presented through the medium of the Fathers so as to exclude that ideal. That it did not do so is shown sufficiently by the account of the work of Augustine, and amply by the course of later history beyond the confines of this book, even apart from the internal logic of the situation. The pagans were right in insisting that man needed of his nature an object to contemplate, an object to love; that taken together with his surroundings he was, from the nature of things, set on the road to perfection by obligations, and involved in a network of paths not arbitrarily beaten out by his irrational desires, but set before him by the constitution of that reality of which he was himself a part, and which his mind was capable of apprehending, was made to grasp. That there was and had to be repeated failure is also true, but it was because of incomplete knowledge of the circumstances rather than the illogicality of the idea. Man was a higher creature, but not on that account wholly other than he guessed; he had fallen lower, but not so as to become a different nature, than he knew. He was made for the contemplation and love of a higher object than his natural powers could lead him to, but it was still an object of knowledge and love which under the tuition of the obligation it imposed would lead him to virtue and perfection. He had been endowed with,

had lost, and for ever been offered new powers of mind and will which would enable him to tread this path. Contemplation of the idea, organisation in its light of the material and the object, which included the self—what was needed beyond the balanced combination of these typically Hellenic and Roman elements in man's life? Only a higher form to contemplate, a greater and more perfect work to be wrought, and strength to do both. Man's spirit asked for that. More light, more strength. A clearer vision and more steadfast gaze on a higher standard than he could find; more strength to cling to it; more force to follow it and bear it through his world. And with Christianity there came the desired revelation implying the correlative gift of higher powers of mind to receive and see it, greater powers of penetration under the influence of the Holy Spirit of the God at once revealing and revealed, and a correspondingly greater revelation of the Good to be realised both as object to be effected in the world and to be attained as the supreme perfection now offered to man as his own. Christianity did not reverse the classical ideal, it re-affirmed it, but in a new and wider context, which transformed without abolishing it. In this new context the meaning of the text was deepened and given a more vivid significance. The Spirit enlivened the letter and did not erase it.

If at first classical self-assurance was shaken by the new faith, if at first the new faithful emphasised the lack of self-sufficiency of the classical man, that was because in human fashion they both realised the division involved by the new epoch, and it took time (as for most men it does take time) to bring to birth the unification of what had been divided. But as in thought we distinguish in order to unite, so in history successive movements sift their predecessors in order to mingle them anew. It is not true that the baby has to be thrown out with the bath water. If that happens it is because external action is allowed to become divorced from the vision of the idea,

and to tend blindly to its term unchecked. The mind forgets to gaze on the revelation which the object makes to it, and so subjects itself to the flow of becoming and action which has only come to exist in virtue of the original vision, and which only has a right to continue under the control of its continued direction. There was a vision of the whole; there was a perception of the difference between the old and the new; there was a striving for the goal and an opposition to the old. If the secondary vision of difference is persisted in and the primary one of the whole which included both old and new be forgotten, then man rests in denial and distinction and opposition. And the more devotedly he allows himself to be involved in this course, the more does he inevitably forget the original intuition with which it began and the ultimate realisation with which it should end. Tertullian provides an excellent example. *Quid Athenae Hierosolymis?* Mr. Cochrane entitles his sixth chapter. 'Nothing, nothing,' was Tertullian's resounding answer. 'I owe no obligation to campus, forum or senate . . . I serve neither as magistrate nor soldier, I have withdrawn from the life of secular society . . . let us mourn when the heathen are happy, and when they begin to mourn let us be glad . . . we have no need for curiosity since Jesus Christ, nor for inquiry since the Evangel . . .' He knew of revelation and inspiration and the individual's responsibility for his own destiny; he saw the difference between knowledge and faith, between the social ideals of Christianity and Romanity; he put himself and persisted in opposition, and beginning by excluding natural knowledge and social life from his aim, he ended by being excluded from the faith and the society of believers. Mr. Demant in *The Religious Prospect* showed how the seeking of ends purely within time and creation leads to a despairing and agonised thrust from one extreme to another as each in turn proves unsatisfying. It is the result of a partial view of reality, and a similar disaster will be caused if the mind

remains motionless in the secondary vision of distinction while the will continues to act. The unreasonableness of unreason will be reflected in moral failure.

To give man the whole vision the Christian revelation of God and man's need of him was required. Plotinus bade men look upwards and express what they saw. Christ showed man what there was above him, and thus incidentally forestalled the danger of immersion in material things which attends the quest for knowledge and the idea. But Christianity did not destroy the value of human knowledge and organization. Rather by the actual deification of the principle of incarnation it made possible the sanctification of matter and science, made it possible for all man's natural activities to help towards gaining the supernatural perfection which was offered him. At the same time the emphasis put on the directly divine and spiritual detached man from caring overmuch about visible and tangible results. Matter could now be revered as God's creation and akin to the Lord's body. It could also confidently be abandoned to divine providence, left behind in God's care, when the call of the Spirit came to spirit to leave it.

How much Christianity was, in fact, enriched by the legacy of Greece and Rome is actually freely acknowledged by Mr. Cochrane. Thus he admits that it was out of the dismantled fragments of *Romanitas* that the Church constructed a system of thought designed to supplement and reinforce the appeal of naïve Christianity, and thus secure its final victory (p. 231); that 'the Church did, indeed, help to civilize the barbarians, partly by assuming custody of the literature which, throughout classical times, had contained the spiritual nourishment of men, partly by communicating to the invaders something of the spirit of order and discipline which it had acquired from its association with the fallen empire' (p. 357). He sees how Julian's view of the new faith would have destroyed 'the significance of the Evangel as the culmination of a *praeparatio*



which embraced the total spiritual experience of mankind' (p. 288). At the same time the final chapter on Necessity and Human Destiny shows the new context and completion of the old standards much more clearly than it demonstrates any ultimate contradiction. That man is a being capable of knowing and loving the truth and goodness of being is the truth at the basis of the classical view of life and of any genuinely Christian philosophy too. And since truth is one, the coming of the First Truth on earth necessarily brought progress but no reversal.

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## CONTEMPLATION AND CULTURE

IN these last months England, individualistic, active, bustling England, has been called upon to defend for Europe, and for the world, the precious treasure of Christian Culture. That culture has, however, been handed down to us, not by an active, utilitarian philanthropy characteristic of all that is not mere self-seeking in England to-day, but by the tradition of Christian contemplation incarnate in the contemplative orders of the Church, and in particular in the Order of St. Benedict. England has become permeated with that American pragmatism which discountenances contemplation as useless, and at best she retains a certain attachment to 'useless' knowledge and to art only as the remnant of the pagan classical period of enlightenment that forsook Christianity and the supernatural order and adopted a purely natural type of contemplation and culture. If the British victory for which we hope and pray is, therefore, to prove itself worthy of its noble cause it would be necessary for the British citizen to return to a more integral Christian life which should