

POINTS OF VIEW

DEAR REVEREND EDITOR,

I am writing to ask if you would be so good as to give me some help on the question of how to practise charity to our neighbours who are 'neurotics'. People suffering in this way seem to be increasing in numbers so that very few of us live without some contact with them. As it is therefore becoming a general sort of difficulty, it seems a good idea to get some sort of general ruling. Up till now the practice, for the most part, has been either to avoid those who suffer mentally, or to try to bear with them patiently. The first way does not seem altogether charitable, but even if it were, it is not always possible. The second has these difficulties:

(a) Very few people have a nervous system strong enough to cope with a neurotic without undue strain—in fact, without becoming 'infected'.

(b) It seems as if neurotics attach themselves more particularly to sensitive people—who are therefore the most vulnerable.

(c) By its nature this disease makes its victims demand the full and constant attention of their 'audience'; it often becomes almost impossible for any work to get done while they are around—or not properly done.

(d) It sometimes seems as if patience and 'humouring' does no good to the neurotic, but merely increases the selfishness which seems to be the root of the neurosis. (Yet thwarting has frightening effects!)

Meanwhile our Lord has said: 'If anyone demands your coat, give him your cloak too.' And: 'If he compels you to go a mile—go two'. Are mental cases outside this command? (Were there no 'neurotics' in our Lord's day—or did he exorcise them?) What is more—is it safe to suppose that ordinary people can distinguish among their more trying acquaintances as to which are suffering from a disease, and which are merely, say, 'a little liverish'? It needs a certain amount of time, and good judgment, and an unemotional outlook. Which of us are sure we possess these? (Especially after some time spent in the company of a neurotic, one may add!)

I should like to suggest that it might possibly be our modern

form of 'plague'. Perhaps disease has shifted from the body to the mind. In past times certain diseases were considered, quite wrongly, of course, to be a disgrace. Sufferers tried to hide them. Consequently they spread. Once they were forced to come into the open and be treated, some sort of control over the disease itself was gained. In fact, in some cases the disease is well on the way to being eliminated, or has disappeared altogether. Would it not therefore be an act of charity to try to check the spread of this diseased mental condition by some such methods? Neurotics are more than normally concerned with the opinion of others. Particularly they avoid anyone who appears to have discovered their abnormal condition. If the symptoms were sufficiently well known as to be (safely!) recognized, and if it were the practice to approach them on this delicate subject (instead of pretending it did not exist), might not these people—in desperation, as it were—find themselves forced to take treatment, or try to cure themselves (which goes a long way towards a cure, in this case) and thus in time the disease would become less prevalent?

Meanwhile, please, what must one do here and now, when having to deal with such a sufferer? Should we aim at charity so heroic as to risk, not life, but sanity? Would such an offering be what is required, as sacrifice, for the conquering of the evils which have brought about this state of affairs? Is the foregoing suggestion merely a 'natural' solution, while we who aim at Christian perfection should be willing to forego self-protection, and act super-naturally?

There are several of us who will be truly grateful for an authoritative answer to this problem.

Yours sincerely,

G.H.

'The Apostle as Poet'

TO THE EDITOR, THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT,

One cannot help but feel that Mr Shayer has missed the point of the article on 'The Apostle as Poet'. It is not my wish to attempt to defend Fr Pepler. He is more qualified than I to answer the charges made. While not seeking to arbitrate, perhaps I may be allowed a word on what seems to me a point of some importance. The problem that lies at the heart of all apostolic activity can be