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'IN WHOM WE HAVE OUR BEING'

An enquiring Jew was discussing recently the Hebrew background to the Christian Liturgy. He was maintaining that the Last Supper was practically identical in its blessings over the cup and over the bread with the blessings of the Jewish Passover. He concluded by a denial of the Real Presence in view of these consecrating words being so similar to those still used by the Jews; and he added, 'In any case if you Catholics *really did* believe your *awe* and *reverence* would be almost paralysing; it is too tremendous'. These arguments have often been repeated and there have been many who were amazed at the callous attitude of the Catholic in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. This particular conversation was typical, and typical in particular of the sincere Jew. He accepts the ground plan of true religion but the beauties of the house constructed on that plan are too wonderful for belief. His Bible takes him up to Bethlehem and the Last Supper, but the incredible generosity and condescension of God appal him; the religion of awe holds him back, off with his shoes, this is holy ground.

Catholics do indeed fail to recognise the gifts that are offered them by the faith; and they have been asked not to stand back and hide their faces but to come and share in the heavenly presence of God. The trouble is that they so often do neither. It might be better for them

indeed if they did begin again with the religion of fear, if they lay prostrate and buried their faces whenever the Sacrament was exposed. They might begin to learn once more the universality of their Catholic faith. But that advice would be merely atavistic unless they could wake up and face *the Reality* before them. The Jew might expect them to stand in awe of the presence of the Holy Trinity in the souls of Christian men and women. The doctrines of grace and of the mystical body are simply the personal, individual application of the doctrine of the Incarnation and of the Eucharist. The faith is centred on the real presence of God in every heart beat of life.

We must in a sense go further than the faith, for grace does not only build on nature, it perfects it. So the natural presence of God the Creator takes on a new light altogether, in which the Jew should tremble at the sight of any bush or twig. All bushes, all trees, all natures are burning in that presence. The Christian may settle down to prove the existence of God; he may work logically to that conclusion following the five traditional ways in order to satisfy his reason and to justify himself to the atheist. But in a soul already possessed by faith these proofs should work so that they are coloured through and through by what he knows from revelation. Thus the atheist may perhaps be convinced ultimately by the dextrous use of the *Quinque Viae*. But to the atheist it still *means* little or nothing. It does not change his life to know that the table at which he is sitting is not only supported by the power of God but that it has its being from him. But to the one who has the faith the proof has a tremendous significance. Perhaps it may be said that he knew it all before from the direct revelation of God. The Christian, however, becoming a theologian in this way, lights up what he hears from God by the action of his own reason; he links the 103rd psalm with the proof from order. *How great are thy works, O Lord! Thou hast made all things in wisdom: the earth is filled with thy riches.* The proof which concludes to the author of order and sequence may be straw in the end, no doubt, as St Thomas saw, but straw which has borne great and heavy ears of wheat. For this is the sort of discursive meditation which must in the end be abandoned, but which in its day bears great fruit and leads on to real union with God.

The presence of God in the very being of things is the presence of the blessed Trinity, the presence of the Lover of man, the presence of *my* Lover. And he is in fact making these things and giving them to me; and not only things but events also. 'In him we *move*.' The accidents and incidental, insignificant happenings of every day, these are his gifts redolent of his presence, poured out from him by

his love. But the Giver is not apart from his gifts; he does not hand them to us at arm's length. He is in them supporting them, giving them their being by the presence of his own infinite being. In other words, the presence which is stated by the proof is shown by faith to have a purpose. Every thing and every event, being *in* God in this way, has its purpose for our sanctification and his glorification. That is the dual purpose of this living presence of God, and these two aspects are one and the same. All things being made for the glory of God, through man's cooperation, man achieves his wholeness and his holiness by cooperating, by taking these gifts from God and bringing them back to him, as the child *returns* his mother's kiss.

Believing this the Jew must either wither away in awe or expand in living love. Because the presence is so ubiquitous and so momentous (in the sense of the all embracing moment as well as of an all powerful momentum) that man must either forget about it, as so many do today, or enlarge his soul in love. The challenge is so great that it means total surrender or indifference. The indifferent man lives on the natural plane and avoids the supernatural elevations of faith except for morning and night prayers, and on Sundays when he acknowledges the presence of God in a church. His whole life tends to be natural and therefore surrendered to the power of secularism. Things are just things, a house is merely four walls and a roof, a meal is simply the intake of nourishment, events are merely events without ultimate significance or purpose because the presence and purpose of God are overlooked in them. It is a mystery that a man can still retain the faith and even live in a state of grace and yet remain so unmoved by this presence which is revealed by the faith. This mystery is nevertheless a very common fact of experience. A man can remain a 'good Catholic' and yet be quite unmoved by the faith that is in him. The extent to which the modern Catholic accepts the standards of the world about him, standards which are pagan in inspiration, reveals the inoperative nature of his faith.

To the man who recognises the challenge and surrenders, all is different. The Real Presence proceeds from the altar into the depth of his heart at Holy Communion, and after that it remains with him during the day. The eucharistic body is ordered to the mystical body as a means to an end. The eucharistic presence is therefore given that the presence of Christ may be more real in his followers. But there are other 'presences' of God. God has become man and given his human body as food for men; he is also present in the things he has made. God is present in all these things and people in different ways. Christ in his human nature is present in the

Eucharist and in the mystical body in different ways. But the ultimate reality of the Trinity remains the real background of all these presences, so that the Christian can recognise outside what corresponds with what is inside him. God, the blessed Trinity, Christ himself, within, so these presences can be detected outside, in the stones on the road, the bricks of the walls, the men and women on the foot-path. *This* is my body, and *this*, and *this*. No longer is the Real Presence isolated in the tabernacle; the idea of the 'prisoner' behind a locked door gives place to the reality of the Word in whom all things are made.

The differences made by this light of faith are of course incalculable. As an example we might take the Catholic teaching about private property. Nature, we say, inculcates this right; we can discover it by reason. Thus insisting upon reason I settle down to possess *my own* land, house, furniture, and books. I see no further than these things which I make part of myself, extensions of my own personality. But when I receive them as presents from God, see in them that holy Presence, and discover the purpose for which he is pressing these things upon me, I discover that they are treasures. And they are treasures which bring with them a responsibility, for I must make use of them as part of my worship of God. I must return at once the kiss and the embrace. They are mine only to take back to God, to turn into things which praise him through me. They are indeed extensions of *his* personality, members in a way of his body. The cup at the table is the chalice of the Last Supper. For indeed if I drink at dinner as a Christian I drink honour to God and praise him; if I drink because *my* body needs the water from *my* well then I abuse the gift and forget the Giver. Or again, the events that happen around me, the great world-shattering events of wars, atom-bombs, financial crises, and the insignificant events of a fine Saturday afternoon, a screaming child next door, or a chance meeting of an acquaintance in the street, all these events seen in the light of the Real Presence shed that fatalistic air adopted by the modern secular world. They are meant, they proceed from a Mind and a Heart intent upon salvation and glory. Every incident now has a meaning—it speaks of God, it speaks to God; and eventually I hear the accents of God himself.

We need not give further examples; it should be patent that in the critical days in which we live the faith in the Presence is needed more than at any other time. Without that faith the meaningless presence of created things and the meaningless succession of events lead to an indifference and despair which make it impossible for the Christian to act as a leaven. The salt does indeed lose its savour

when the Presence is thus removed. In *him* we live and move and have our *being*: and the alternative to recognising that truth is hell. The reasoned ethics of the *Summa* or of the Social Encyclicals will make no difference to that hell unless they be enlivened by this real presence. Pagan virtues are their own reward and they may mean little more than the comfortable bank balance.

Christians today are simply asked to have the faith, to let the light shine. They should accept the whole of truth in their act of surrender. They should approach the mysterious presence of God with reverence and stilling awe as the Jew approached the cloud in the Temple; they should step reverently into that shining cloud as on Thabor; they should then learn to perceive how that cloud envelops the whole world and how it soaks into the centre of their being so that their minds cannot escape its influence. Once their reason is flooded by the Real Presence the earth is renewed for them. We want to make now a new earth, a new way of life in which men can walk without the danger of material corruption which is subtly penetrating our very thought, we seek a road which leads away from Hiroshima. Here it is—now.

Then I saw a new heaven, and a new earth. The old heaven, the old earth had vanished, and there was no more sea. And I, John, saw in my vision that holy city which is the new Jerusalem, being sent down by God from heaven, all clothed in readiness like a bride who has adorned herself to meet her husband. And I heard, too, a voice which cried aloud from the throne, Here is God's tabernacle pitched among men; he will be his own people, and he will be among them, their own God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. . . . And he who sat on the throne said, Behold I make all things new.—*Apocalypse*, 21, 1-6.

THE END