

In times of tyrannic despotism, there will doubtless always be a division of minds. One group, the great majority, will decide for maximum adaptation, in order to protect themselves and their relatives from harm, or 'to prevent a worse evil'. The other group—made up of the few—will see this adaptation as the worst choice, and decide from the very beginning on the sharpest conceivable resistance, risking their lives. There must be people in each nation who, especially in the fateful hours, do not think first of their own welfare, but intervene courageously for justice in public life. And without external success, even in their failure, they establish a great example. This applies especially to the Germans, for their character training is the weakest part of their education.

A brief but important section of a review of this book is due to Fr Kreutzburg, chaplain for Fr Reinisch and also his biographer. Under the conditions of Hitler's Germany, he had to have special prudence, in order on the one hand not to endanger all spiritual ministrations in the armed services, and on the other hand, as a priest to render loving aid to the prisoner.

His concluding verdict is characteristic, and correct beyond all doubt: 'It was the great disaster of our nation that there were lacking people who, upright and unconcerned about the consequences, followed their consciences.' In this matter his book is very valuable for the education of our nation.



## THE APOSTLE AS POET

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**T**HE true apostle must be a poet, and an apostle who is not a poet is no true apostle.

In order to understand this claim, we may start by describing the would-be apostle who is no apostle. A Christian sets out to be an apostle for Christ. He joins a Catholic Action group or enters an Order such as that of the Dominicans who specialize in preaching. He begins to prepare himself for the work by reaching down from the shelves of the library large tomes of Christian doctrine and theology. He learns all that the Church commonly

teaches; he delves into St Thomas's deep and precise explanations. Better still, he may con the gospels to discover what Christ himself taught. He will study, too, maybe in a course of apologetics, all the reasons against the faith that are likely to be brought up against him in his missionary activity, and he will discover, not merely 'the answers' as though every problem he met could be answered by his own wit, but, sensibly, he will discover the lines along which such attacks can be met and parried. If he is serious and keen, therefore, he will store in his mind a great system of Christian ideas, understanding them according to his own ability and always deepening his appreciation of these tremendous principles which stem both from revealed religion and from his natural reason. A wonderful world will have been forming in his own mind, a world that approximates in some manner to the Word, the Idea of God, in which all things are made. And in order that this world should receive the spark of life from that Word the would-be apostle does not neglect his prayer, but takes all he learns to the feet of Christ and begs him to make his thought fruitful and not stagnant and sterile. On his knees he learns his theology, meditating the words of the gospels and perhaps on occasion taking his *Summa* to his half-hour period of prayer so that he may think over these truths and explanations in the presence of our Lord.

And he is wise, this self-dedicated apostle; he knows that he must understand the world into which he is to be sent to preach the word. Therefore he studies also the world-movements, the thought of the day. Communism by the time he has finished his studies holds no mystery for him. He knows the materialism of the age and he has read the philosophies that underlie it—not only existentialism and logical-positivism, but also the social theories of the left and the right wings. He has read about the industrial revolution and he has grasped the principles that underlie the unrest among the working classes. The pagans of today who know not Christ are before him in his books and in his mental system.

At last all is prepared and he steps out upon the pulpit or the platform convinced that he can sow the seed of the Word in the soil of the twentieth-century world. Everything that can be said to the multitude is on his lips—and no one pays any attention to what he says. They sleep or turn away. The dull-witted audience cannot hear a word he says; all is noise, a continuous babel of

words that make no stir within their hearts. The gap between the preacher and the people remains unbridged.

How comes it that with all his preparation he is so ineffective? Simply that he has killed or seriously wounded the poet that lies within him, the gift of nature. All his study and even all his prayer has dried up his imagination, so that he now lacks the living image that would stir the dullest wit even though the preacher had but half the knowledge.

If we turn to actual facts, we shall find that often the apostles who have the greatest effect are not always the most learned nor even the most pious or saintly. We find men who are not particularly noted for their adherence to religious observance, men who are even known to lead almost a 'double life'—in the pulpit and in private—yet men who have the art of 'tuning in' to their audience, discovering the 'wave-length' not of the majority only, but of each individual among their hearers. There are men who can talk about St Thomas to young and old, educated and raw, intelligent and obtuse, and bring home something to each, stir something within the various individuals in all their variety. What he talks about may be learned or merely moralizing platitudes. The great mass-movers of our day, also, have cultivated this art to a very high degree; men like Hitler or Billy Graham. The first thing in these cases is not what they say but the way they say it, the manner in which they present the subject of their discoveries. These men have something of the poet within them, whereas the good-hearted, zealous and hard-working 'apostle' has so often killed his poetic genius.

The poet, in effect, is the man who makes things by means of imagination as well as of thought. It is all very well to call this power his creative genius; it is creative only in a metaphorical sense. He does not make things from nothing after the manner of the divine operation, but fashions the things he makes from the raw material of his experience. From what he finds around him in the entire universe the poet recreates, makes something new; old truths become new and living through the action of his imagination and thought; old scenes and experiences take on a new life through this activity. It might be said that the would-be apostle, as we have described him, uses the same activity and recreates with his thought and words the truths that he had studied. But this is not so because he has restricted his experience,

as far as he has been able, to the ideas he has been considering and to his own limited world of prayer and sacred doctrine. He has not tuned in to the whole universe as it exists. The poet has first of all to be receptive to the whole of existence; he has to be silent and to listen. The modern composer for example does not begin by making music, by setting together in a certain order and rhythm sounds that he discovers in his own mind. He has first to listen to the sounds of the present-day world; many of these are harsh and dissonant. The sound of machinery, high-explosives and 'atmospherics' on the radio—all this is part of the experience of modern man; and the composer who shuts himself away as far as he can from the racket of the world and feeds his imagination on sounds of the past, medieval plainsong or the great classics of the nineteenth century will fail to be a true composer and become only a recording instrument of the sounds of past ages; just as the would-be apostle is a recording instrument of ideas of another world. The originals are true and moving in their own right, but the copy is false in that it pretends to belong to the present.

The poet, then, listens to what is present. Yet the present does of course include the past. Tradition has brought man to what he is today, an immense tradition stemming from man's first, primitive experience of the world around him. Within the present experience lies an immense labyrinth of unexpressed, often unconscious experiences of the whole age of man. For example, the present age may be labelled as an irreligious, pagan and even atheistic age; and yet beneath the surface lies the experience of men's worship of the primitive gods and, in Europe, of centuries of adherence to the Trinity through the person of Christ. Indeed, since Christ is the Word of God and since he died for all mankind there lies beneath the present reality of man's way of life the redemptive act, or, as it has been called, 'the redemptive process'.

The poet, therefore, does not listen merely to superficial experience, but his imagination is fired by this tradition. He may not be aware of the nature of what he is receiving. He may, for example, reject the whole story of the Incarnation and the Redemption; and yet if he is a true poet the Redemption, the effect of sacrifice, the death that brings new life will be working in his imagination and thought and eventually appear in his words, his painting or his music. This is why he is able to stir men in the depth of their being and bring to the surface things of

which his hearers were unaware but which lie deep within themselves, latent powers needing merely this spark to set them in motion. The musician does not merely repeat the sounds of the present any more than of the past. Men are aware of the racket around them. But they are unaware of the meaning of that noise, and the true composer creates out of present sound a moving piece of music because he has penetrated to the heart of it, discovered its links with tradition, married it to the primitive instinct for rhythm and dance by which man has worshipped the gods.

In his awareness of the present, the true apostle discovers the instinctive powers in the modern man. He is not satisfied with the superficial appearance of what men do, not carried away by their present immorality or materialism. It is all too easy to generalize about the evils of the present generation, and the 'would-be' apostle who has discovered his own spiritual world will fall a victim to the contrast between his own discovery and what he perceives of 'the world' unless he is very careful not to be carried away by the superficial view. Beneath the good and the evil that he perceives lie these instincts with their immense tradition, instincts that are fundamentally good and fundamentally religious. The true apostle hears the rhythm of religion beneath the hum of the factory, the shriek of the jet plane, or the shattering crash of the atomic explosion. He may not do this consciously, but it is one of the secrets of the success of his words, the poetic secret.

It will be obvious that the poet does not listen in a merely passive manner; he is not *merely* receptive. The so-called creative element in his character lies in his active awareness of reality around him. His perception is an active one by means of the living symbols that fructify his imagination. He does not simply report what he sees either superficially or below the surface; his imagination acting with his mind makes what he perceives into a living image. This may easily be seen in the difference between the photograph of a country scene and the painting of it by a true artist. The artist brings out a new form from the material before him which in its turn stirs something within the admirer of the picture. The artist with words must do the same so that the symbol of his word-picture stirs the inner spirit of his reader or listener. The 'would-be apostle' has learnt only to photograph what he sees of his own world or of 'the world' outside and the photograph

stirs only those who have already experienced what was reproduced on the negative.

But now we must turn specifically to the poet-apostle in order to understand the type of creative imagination that he must train within himself. The material with which he works is the whole of reality in a far more universal mode than in any other type of poet, because he perceives everything that now is in a context of divine grace. Since man was originally created in grace and the Word of God became man and died for the whole human race there is nothing that falls outside the world of grace. The sinner and the devil himself cannot be perceived truly and constructively except in relation to the supernatural because they are what they are only through having refused grace. Moreover there is nothing now that is 'purely natural'. These primitive instincts in man, though they are part of his nature, do not give him purely natural religion; they form a natural element in what must be ultimately either a supernatural religion or the deformation of that religion. The apostle, therefore, sees all things in relation to the Redemption; he understands that Christ is the head of all men and of the whole universe so that everything speaks to him of Christ and of the work of Christ. All that now exists is *in Verbo*, in Christ the Word made flesh, so that the primitive and the complex present is re-formed by the apostle in the Image of God who is the Word, the second Person of the blessed Trinity. By means of his poetic faculty he 'tunes in' to the reality of man as he is today. But this awareness of the rhythm of life is not restricted to the natural; the apostle perceives all this, we might say, as the heartbeat of Christ. The instinct for sacrifice that exists strongly in the patriotism of the soldier dying for his country or in the heroism of the convinced and active Communist is re-formed in the imagination and thought of the apostle in terms of the one central sacrifice of the universe. The myths, symbols and traditions that he discovers hidden in the breast of modern man are redeemed by his imagination, the blood of Christ flowing over them all and purifying them and integrating them within the new life of the Resurrection.

The difference between the poet who is merely concerned in winning allegiance to any 'this-worldly' view that he may have discovered and the true apostle lies in this, that the former perceives only one element in the present situation whereas the apostle perceives it all in the image, we might almost say, in the

imagination, of Christ. Christ himself was the greatest poet and the apostle has become Christ both in the order of imagination and in the order of the inner spirit of grace.

This poetic talent, although a gift to every man by nature, is at first only a latent power which, as we have seen, can be stifled. But if it is to be trained, as the true apostle should train it, it requires an asceticism of its own. The poet not only has to learn the technique of his art, whether in words, music or the plastic arts—and that obviously requires long training and constant practice—but he must also practise a special detachment from the superficial beauties that appear to him. This is especially true of the poet who works with words and sets out to attract people with what he has to say. His temptation is to play to the gallery and to try to stir up emotions that are only transitory and superficial. The life of the people is not truly touched merely by dramatic and histrionic gestures and word-pictures, and it would be a mistake to think that what has been written above is meant to inculcate simply a method of catching the people's attention by the popular appeal to emotions. The apostle must practise a severe detachment from the emotional appeal, so that he can dig deeper into reality and re-discover the fundamental symbols. This means a very real self-denial on his part, for he can only keep clear of the attraction of the success of his own words if he keeps his eye fixed on the ultimate reality of Christ and refuses to be carried along by popularity into unprepared, indiscriminating preaching and insists on having time for silence and the creative awareness of which we have spoken. In the modern world this is perhaps one of the most difficult types of asceticism—to insist on not being rushed and on a real preparation for his writings and preaching. No great poet has ever survived the rush of popularity without a severe detachment from success.

There are other aspects of this asceticism of the poet-apostle which there is no space to elaborate here. But he must practise detachment also from the symbols which he discovers, detachment from his imagination and from all the pulsating reality which he notices around him. This will be even harder because these things are more real, truer, nearer to his own nature and personality. If he does not keep himself free from the attraction of the great beauty of these things he will become an idolater—and a modernist into the bargain.

Enough will have been said to show how the 'would-be apostle' must attempt to correct himself if he is successfully to preach the word of God. His theology and his prayer will not be sufficient unless linked with the nature of things by means of a true and creative imagination. His supernatural world will be an unreal and unproductive world if he regards it as set apart from nature, as being only in the heavens. He must discover it everywhere and he can only find the redemptive grace of God shining from every atom of reality if he has trained himself in a true awareness and practised the art of poetry.



## ON REFLECTING GOD

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**M**ANY Catholics feel increasingly disturbed in their faith nowadays by the anthropological approach to religion. Anthropologists currently look upon religion as just one of the aspects of 'culture', as a psychological objectivation of man's subjective emotions, imaginations and explanations of reality. Gods, spirits, myths are therefore just as man-made, as are human institutions, customs, morals, say they.

May I suggest that in this, as in all other cases of disbelief and misbelief, it is quite wrong on our part (and not only tactically inexpedient) to throw the offered opinion into the waste-paper basket as totally unacceptable. We used to do so with Paganism and have only of late come to see that Pagan beliefs are partial truths that need straightening out and being put in the proper perspective—truths which, when thus treated, enrich our own understanding by an emphasis on facts that often have hitherto escaped us.

When therefore we are told that man makes his god, I would accept this statement as quite true, as far as it goes, but add that unfortunately it does not go far enough. Does every puddle in the road make its own sun? Yes and no—poetically yes, scientifically no. Water reflects light, man reflects God: but there is of course a difference. For light does not reside in water, but God does reside in man. Man reflects God, because man was made in the likeness