

My final paragraph must consider Mascall's warning about the dangers of 'secularizing' eucharistic belief (M, p. 546). I am wholly at one with him here, and hope that my book will show that I am at least alive to the dangers, whether or not I remain unscathed. I draw on BB iv, 5 for some concluding remarks at this point. The very flatness of behaviouristic or ethical reductions of the Eucharist makes them both specious and unsatisfying.¹ But if some newer thinkers decode eucharistic ritual as ethics, it is just as true that older thinkers decoded it as physics; and, decoding it thus, were obliged by a sense of fittingness to unsay or to forget results of their decoding. My own suggestions, I should like to think, amount to letting ritual communicate as ritual—a programme that is a good deal more arduous than it sounds. There, for the present, I leave it.

Me and the Monks

by Joyce Galbraith

My reactions to all priests and monks are based partly on my own early memories of my convent school and on my father's healthy anti-clericalism. 'Feudal barons . . . that's what they are, nothing but feudal barons', he used to roar about the Irish bishops of the thirties and I think he still would have said it had the rooms been bugged and the threat of the salt mines hanging over him. Still, he realized that you couldn't, at that time (and possibly even now in Ireland), beat City Hall or rather the Archbishop's House and so he sent me to the care of the nuns. I have written about my hatred of their mixture of hypocrisy, snobbery and sanctimonious smugness elsewhere. All I can say on the credit side of my attempted brain-washing is that its harshness was like Commando training in that nothing, I feel, will ever be quite as bad again. My school days left me with the shaky idea that the Almighty was a Furious Old Man for most of the time and that there just *might* be a hell, so I went to Mass on Sundays to pacify him and I gabbled daily prayers as if presenting a shopping list.

Years in England practising as a psychiatrist diluted whatever bits of bogus religion I had left. This worried me at first, so conditioned was I to the crackles of hellfire if you didn't go to Mass. I was a

¹One thinks of the passage in the article 'Transubstantiation' in *Sacramentum Mundi* (Vol. 6, p. 294) where a eucharistic analogy is drawn with the putting of the bricks of one building to a new finality in another. An adequate comment on such theology is that it bores.

reluctant unbeliever and so I tried to do something about it. I mentioned my doubts to a priest in Confession and he said 'Its your age' (I was 31 at the time!). I felt just as indignant as most women patients do when their doctor rakes this up when he doesn't know really what's the matter with them. Feeling that there ought to be a sort of spiritual clinic where people like myself could bring their symptoms of accidie and religious ennui I even went back to my old enemies, the nuns, because a friend told me that a day retreat might help me. It didn't. I was put into a small room and given a boring little book written by an old Jesuit whose fertile output gracing the Irish church book-stands must make him the Harold Robbins of the holy book world.

My appalling ignorance might be the trouble, I thought, and I made a dive for the theologians. But *they* kept referring to the philosophers and so I wrestled with Nietschze, Kant, Hegel, feeling cerebrally bemused but as virtuous as the girl who was asked by some character in an American book, 'Diddums eat ums Spinoza then?'. Freud and Jung I already knew, but, fascinating though they were, especially Freud, his emphasis on what is, admittedly, his own version of sexuality was too much for an Irish person to swallow and only Adler made some sense. I moved on to the Huxleys and I liked the lucidity and the sense of humour that Aldous displayed, but my albatross of unbelief was heavier than ever and then I read Russell and became convinced that This Was IT. His writing, after the other philosophers, was like drinking cool clear water after some indigestible Teutonic meal.

I went off to Confession to a certain order of monks who have a church near where I live and I told the monk that that all my faith in a God had gone after reading Bertrand Russell. 'I felt that way, too, after reading him . . . but only for a while.' There was a pause, and he added: 'It's a phase that some intelligent people go through'. I admired his panache, but what he said didn't really help—like telling a person with toothache that *other* people suffered in the same way. Still, at least he hadn't told me to say the Rosary, make a pilgrimage or do another retreat. I decided to try another monk and so I went to Confession again the following week, and when I said that I hadn't been to Confession, apart from the previous week, for many months, the voice behind the grille asked, quite gently, why that was? 'The main reason', I said, 'is that I don't believe in God any more and I'm afraid that if I go to Confession "blind" I might well land up with some young priest, just ordained.' There was silence and the monk said, 'Well, you have *now*. I only became a monk two weeks ago.' Our laughter may have scandalized the waiting penitents outside, but I liked these monks. I admired their matter-of-factness and their sense of humour and so I paid them the ultimate compliment of delivering my nine-year-old son to their care.

I had to see the headmaster of the preparatory school first and I dreaded the meeting when I knew I would have to place all my miserable cards on the table. I was an Irishwoman separated from her husband, I practised psychiatry, and I was an unbeliever. Father Y reassured me by his presence alone. A big solid man with alert eyes behind rimless glasses, he showed none of the unnerving lack of ease that so many priests display when talking to a woman (I have often thought that young priests ought to be given instruction on *How To Talk To Women* during their training just as young doctors are tutored on how to deal with relatives). Father Y didn't shuffle, clear his throat nervously or glance at his watch. He listened to what I had to say, the shabby outpourings of a failed life, and then he said: 'Dr Galbraith, we have far worse problems than *yours* to deal with at the school, one of the worst being when children's parents keep changing all the time. That's very difficult.'

My faith in Father Y was justified because after an initial traumatic two weeks my barbaric and illiterate son settled down happily at the school. His hyperkinesis left him, he looked happier, and when I went down to see him I liked the comforting and warm atmosphere in the school. The small boys didn't seem to suffer from any of the religious tyranny of my youth. I *envied* my son this education in which there were enough rules to make the boys feel secure that their environment was structured and yet there was enough liberality and permissiveness not to make them suffocated with religion. And the monks that you occasionally glimpsed about the place nearly all looked serene, and although I understood why many of them reached for their breviaries or lowered their heads when they saw parents coming, I didn't believe the story that one priest leaped out of the window at the approach of a 'difficult parent'. Certainly on the few occasions when I had to see Father X he would give me a glass of sherry and some cogent and direct words about my son.

When my son moved on to the monks' public school I found that things were trickier in that the monks were younger, on the whole, and I became rather resentfully conscious of the public school system with its bizarre rituals, rules and regulations. I got paranoid about my battered car when I saw the many Jaguars and Bentleys of the other parents, and although I saw that the use of the cane was *effective*, it hurt all my liberal instincts—especially when my son accused me in truth of being a renegade psychiatrist when I said that I thought that if the boys knew that a cane existed in their house it might act as a deterrent.

On visiting days I wandered around feeling very lost and envying all the other 'typical parents' who perhaps had just as many problems as I and yet managed to look so self-confident. Perhaps it was the British middle-class atmosphere or 'the stiff upper lip' or the basic fact that so many seemed to have plenty of money, but everyone appeared to know exactly what they were doing and I agreed with

my son when he muttered that we should 'Clear out . . . get away from the school.'

My dealings with the monks were, for me, rather tortured. Like when seeing bank managers, there are times when I long to change my sex and be a brisk man. The monks were charming, always polite and invariably kind, but I always felt and feel that really they would rather deal with a male parent. Mind you, the two monks that I found most charming later left the order, one to get married!

All the monks seemed so sophisticated—that I began to feel that my lack of faith was almost fashionable. My son's house was festooned with bright pictures, two at least depicting nudes and causing my Irish mother to cross herself, and the revues that were put on by the boys (and some of the girls in the sixth form) made me wonder at first if it wasn't my tarnished mind that took such meanings until I realized that they were elevating the art of the blue double-entendre to levels that I had never heard before. I admired the liberality that made them show the film '*If*' at the school. I even loved going to Mass there, but that wasn't from any laudable motivations but because the setting and the presentation of the Mass appealed to my theatrical instincts. There was the suitably impressive Abbey, the entry of the monks dramatically cowled, and the well-trained choir which could change from plain chant to soothing contemporary guitar music with smooth ease.

Maybe it's the tolerance of increasing age or slow maturation, but the sight of a habit or a soutane no longer has a Pavlovian effect on me. I myself like to think it's because I have found the monks to be so kind and uncensorious and, most important of all, they have done a good job on my son. So I am beginning to think that perhaps there *may* be a Benevolent Someone after all, and, like W. C. Fields, I find myself looking up the Bible for loop-holes.