

On Choosing the Good Portion

Dr. Paulose Mar Gregorios

Outstanding scholar, theologian, philosopher, polyglot and man of letters. Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios sought to bring together in a holistic vision, several unrelated disciplines like philosophy, economics, political science, medicine, education, physics and theology.

Born in 1922 at Tripunithura, Kerala, the great scholar-bishop had his earlier stints in his homestate as a journalist and postal service employee. He proceeded to Ethiopia in 1947 accepting the job of a teacher there and in course of time became the Special Secretary to Emperor Haillie Sellasi. He had an exceptional educational career in Yale, Princeton and Oxford Universities. Returning to Kerala, he was ordained as a priest of the Orthodox Church. In 1967 Fr. Paul Verghese became the Principal of the Orthodox Theological Seminary. In 1975, he was elevated as a bishop. Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios took charge of the Delhi Diocese of the Orthodox Church in July 1975.

Honours came unsought to Mar Gregorios. He had the good fortune to be the President of the World Council of Churches and the Indian Philosophical Congress. In 1988, he received the Soviet Land Nehru Award. His Grace travelled widely and showed an unusual intellectual courage to explore new paradigms in human thinking. He was visiting professor in several universities like the J. N. U. in New Delhi. The philosopher-bishop passed away on 24th November 1996 and his mortal remains lie entombed in the Orthodox Seminary Chapel, Kottayam.

Including the posthumous publications, Mar Gregorios has authored more than 37 books. *The Joy of Freedom, Freedom of Man, The Cosmic Man, The Human Presence, Enlightenment East and West, A Light Too Bright* and the spiritual autobiography *Love's Freedom: The Grand Mystery* are some of the most remarkable among these. Hundreds of his articles and lectures have been published in leading newspapers, and international magazines.

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**MAR GREGORIOS FOUNDATION
ORTHODOX SEMINARY, KOTTAYAM**

On Choosing the Good Portion

(Meditations)

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Introduction

After “Be Still and Know”, we are fortunate to have another devotional work by the same author under the title “On Choosing the Good Portion”. “Be Still and Know” (1971) was one of the earliest books by Metropolitan Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios (T. Paul Verghese). The concluding paragraph of “Be Still and Know” reads as follows:

“Both the wheat and the tares grow together. History is not ‘progress’, but growth of both good and evil together. The forms of evil and good have become more powerful, more noble, and more far-reaching in their consequences today. ‘Be still, and know’.

The above words hint at the ongoing dilemma of history and the perennial need of searching true peace and wisdom. Search for true peace and wisdom has been the core of Mar Gregorios’ literary genius. Among the variegated facets of this noble mind there has always been a priority for the tranquil transits of a solitary pilgrim who relished the Word of God.

Nevill Drury, the author of “Wisdom Seekers: the Rise of the New Spirituality”, while characterizing the ‘New Age Movement’ as a creative fusion of metaphysics, self-help psychology and holistic approaches to self-awareness, acknowledges that there are deep and significant currents propelling and sustaining the New Age Movement, drawing from the ancient and perennial wisdom teachings. One could very well say that Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios occupies a unique place among the initiators of the ideal New Age of the meeting of the East and the West, basing on the ancient and modern wisdom. The present volume is a posthumous collection and edited compilation of the meditations, bible studies and biblical exhortations of Mar Gregorios in an ideal New Age Perspective. Although each of the reflections had a particular significance in the context of original formulation, the reader realizes for oneself a contemporary relevance. There is always something new in the reflection, whether it be in meditating on the good choice of Mary or the sanity and simplicity of the Wisdom of God or the complementary roles of men and women etc. etc. In brief, the perennial need of searching true peace and wisdom is at least partially met in the reflection in active dialogue with the ongoing dilemma of history and we salute the great saintly author who continues to inspire many.

On Choosing the Good Portion

The Mar Gregorios Foundation (MGF) is proud of making available to public another work by Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios in line with the acclaimed “Be Still and Know”. Dr. Joseph P. Varghese, a devoted disciple of Mar Gregorios, volunteered to do the necessary editing and we are thankful to him for his invaluable services in this connection. MGF is also grateful to Mr. Joice Thottakkad, a devotee of Mar Gregorios and the Secretary of Sophia Books, for undertaking the printing and distribution of this volume. MGF is immensely grateful to all who co-operated behind the publication of this book, especially to Fr. C. C. Cherian, the Secretary, who has played a unique role in making available for publication the entire body of literature coming from Mar Gregorios.

Fr. Dr. Jacob Kurian

President, Mar Gregorios Foundation
Orthodox Seminary, Kottayam

Kottayam
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Editor's Note

The meditations and Bible Study sessions held by Metropolitan Paulose Mar Gregorios of blessed memory were among the most well-attended and sought after programmes in ecumenical conferences and such other events the world over during the latter decades of the 20th century. “On Choosing the Good Portion” is a collection of meditations and bible classes given by Mar Gregorios mostly during the nineteen sixties, seventies and eighties in the West, but in Asia and Latin America as well.

To those who are familiar with the writings of Mar Gregorios, the present small volume is a valuable addition to their collection of his works. To all readers, the text offers fresh insights into the meaning of the Gospel in the contemporary world. He always provides a background to the verses from the Bible, places them in a historical perspective and brings out the implications of the word of God in the present context. He gives points for meditation and discussion towards the end of several chapters, inviting the reader for further contemplation on the topic rather than merely reading the text.

Mar Gregorios deals with a wide range of themes such as life, suffering and hope, the old and the new humanity, meaning of the quality of life and so on. In the chapter on ‘Choosing the Good Portion’, he emphasises the difference between activism and contemplation and asserts that the ‘distraction by the many’ is the crucial issue. In ‘A Study of the Epistle to the Ephesians’ he draws our attention to the question ‘What does it mean to be a christian?’ and dwells up on the eight points which St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians. He passes on the message of the importance of absolute trust in God, unwavering faith in the word of God and the need to place the Church, the community and the society ahead of one’s own self in his sermons, meditations and bible classes.

It is our hope and prayer that this small volume will be immensely valuable to the readers in their spiritual journey and help them in ‘choosing the good portion’.

Kottayam
12.09.2013

Dr. Joseph P. Varghese
Editor

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1

Prayer for a quiet Meditation

O God our Father, my Lord and Master, unto Thee I surrender my body and soul. Rule Thou in my heart, soul, my feeling and my desire, all under Thy divine command. For, except Thou guide them they go wherever they want, and I become their slave. But when Thou art in command all is under control. I am too weak now to control my feelings and desires, my wants and fears.

Make me strong, Lord Jesus Christ and make me pure. Drive out all evil desires. Infuse the purity of Thy Spirit in to my body and soul. Let no evil spirit take over, and let Thy love build me up, Thy holiness purify me, Thy wisdom lead me. Unite my body with Thy body, O Christ, and my soul with Thy soul.

Come, Holy Spirit, come as the fire and burn away all the chaff in me. Come to convict, to convert and to consecrate. Come as the wind and cleanse me of all the dust and dirt in me. Come as the light and show me Thy way. Come to heal, to comfort, to give strength and wisdom. Come Holy Spirit, come, I am Thine.

But above all, at this very moment of prayer, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, fill me with the love of people. May my heart be filled with compassion for others, and may my will be quickened to serve those in need. Teach me to weep with the weeping and to rejoice with the joyful. Unite my heart and soul with the needs of others, with their suffering and joy, with their hopes and fears, so that I no longer live for myself. Teach me to pray, not so much for my own needs, as for the needs of others.

Pour out Thy love into my heart, as well as the hearts of others, so that all our hearts may be welded together by Thy love. For Thou art love, and where truth and love, compassion and holiness, peace and righteousness meet, there Thou art.

In to Thy loving hands, O Lord, we commend our own selves, as well as the selves of all mankind. Have mercy upon us and unite us all by Thy love. Thy Kingdom come, Amen.

2

Be Still and Know: a Spiritual Exercise

1. Imagine your own body. Picture the various systems beautifully coordinated: the respiratory system; the circulatory system; the digestive system; the nervous system; the skeletal and muscular systems; picture also the various organs - the brain, the eye, the ear, the skin, the tongue the heart, the liver, the pancreas, the lungs etc. See how intricately they are put together to form a body within which life functions.
2. Picture in your mind how this body functions in relation to the outside: the intake of oxygen from the air and the emission of carbon dioxide; the intake of food and drink and the elimination of the waste; the intake of images through the eye; soundwaves through the ear; of particles of fragrant objects through the nose, of heat and cold and other sensations through the skin. We cannot live as human persons without interacting with the material world and the world of other living beings.
3. Imagine again how all the movements of the planet earth are essential to the life cycle , the movement around its own axis, the orbiting around the sun, the moon orbiting around the earth, the whole solar system in relation to the galaxy, the galaxies in the universe etc. All the movements are directly related to my life - my existence. To take the simplest example, the sun gives the energy which plants convert into food; the sun causes night and day, rain and snow, sunshine and storm – all of which affect us. No human being is an isolated island.
4. Now imagine all the cells in one's body – billions of them, constantly growing, decaying and replaced, so that almost none of the cells in my body which existed 20 years ago are there today. What is the energy that creates cells, uses them, discards them and replaces them in such an orderly and systematic way that continuity is not lost.
5. Imagine again the energy system that makes the universe go as with

all its complex systems, that makes our solar and planetary systems work, the life-system work, the life in our bodies work.

6. Now picture to yourself the new life system that was born in this world in the womb of a virgin, by the Annunciation of the word of God through an angel, and through the activity of the Holy Spirit of God. This new germ of life in the womb of the virgin is an integral part of the our universe and our life system; it is an ovum in the womb of the virgin that is fertilised and grows by the process of cell-multiplication common to all human embryos. And yet its origin is not in “the fleshly desire of a human father” as the New English Bible puts it (John 1:13), but from God Himself, the eternal word, eternally with the father, the express image of God.
7. It is this new life-system, paradoxically identical with our human system, and at the same time totally *Sui generis*, without parallel, in that it is a new life, the life that is fully human and fully divine, which because it is human can go through death and came alive through the resurrection. Imagine in your mind the irruption of this new life system into our old death-bound life system. Imagine the conception in the virgin’s womb as the Great Beginning of the life that overcomes death.

Reconstruct the tableau of the angel bringing the Gospel - the Word of God - to this humble poor Palestinian Jewish girl. (If you can get an Eastern orthodox icon of the Annunciation, place it before you and meditate on it).

8. Imagine then that divine - human life growing in the womb, its infancy, boyhood and adulthood; its healing and teaching ministry, its struggle against the Prince of death in the wilderness (the Temptation); the struggle against representatives of the old life; its Crucifixion and Resurrection. Recreate the picture of what happened in the tomb - the sudden coming back to life of a body several days dead; its coming out of the tomb, its appearances to Mary Magdalene and to the Apostles; its ascension into heaven.
9. Now imagine the company of Apostles in the Upper Room as they waited on Pentecost in gloom and near-despair, but with faith and a faint hope - like many of us - afraid of death, afraid of darkness. (Acts 2:1-4)

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10. Now imagine again the new irruption of Life at Pentecost. The noise like a strong driving storm, coming from above, and shattering the gloom and the despair; filling the house with its power, energising the weak and dying; the flame-tongues that settled and sat on each disciple; the speaking in tongues; the bold witnessing to the crowds about the new life that has irrupted into our dead world.
11. Imagine now that small group of people welded together into a well-knit community by the Holy Spirit; the new boldness of power; the new warmth of burning love; the bold preaching of the new life. It is this that is now the Body of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the power that binds together those humble fishermen and makes them the power that would ultimately overthrow all tyranny and oppression. It is to this body that all gifts are given by the Spirit - apostleship, prophecy, healing, teaching, serving, witnessing. It is this Body where the new life can be experienced and witnessed to.
12. What makes the Body united is the presence of the Spirit of God, the same Spirit who came and abode upon Christ at his baptism. The most fundamental gift of this Spirit, the new gift and the new commandment, is love. (Romans 5:5; John 15:17; I Cor. 14:1) It is this love that unites the Church, and makes it a true servant of God, the visible manifest presence of God in the world. Without love there is neither unity nor witness.

Meditate on the relation between love and life. Love creates life; God's love created ours, both the old life and the new life. Love sustains life; God's love sustains us in life. Love is the true basis of hope. He who loves can hope and trust in the Loved One.

Exercise:

Be still and know – know God's love. May that love be poured into your heart by the spirit. As you surrender, God's spirit takes over. Keep nothing back. Give all to love.

3

Sanity and Simplicity

Scripture: I Cor: 1:10-31

Where is the wise man? Where is the man of letters? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God rendered foolish the wisdom of this world? For it was the wisdom of God that the world could not know God by its own wisdom; it was God's pleasure through the foolishness of the proclamation of the Gospel, to save those who believed. (1: 20-22)

The Corinthians had the same standards as the rest of the Roman Empire. A rhetorician or speaker was judged by his verbal power, by his capacity to appear "a wise man" through his sophistry and agility of mind.

By that standard St. Paul was not outstanding. Apollos, the trained rhetorician from Alexandria, was definitely superior. So some of Paul's converts in Corinth left the one Church to form a new group named after Apollos. Then came another group from Jerusalem claiming to bring the original gospel, unpolluted and unadulterated. They formed a third denomination in Corinth. And then someone started a non-denominational group "in the name of Christ" to end all denominations. That becomes a fourth denomination.

How pathetic it is that personal ambitions have had such a large part to play in the life of the Church! From the beginning it was the man of superior wisdom who caused divisions, schisms and heresies in the Church.

The Gospel is authenticated by the simplicity and depth of the believer. Not by his sophistry or rhetorical brilliance. Ecumenism demands the recovery of that depth and simplicity in the one Church.

Prayer : Restore us to sanity and simplicity O Lord, that we may perceive the depth of Thy Salvation. Deliver us from theological virtuosity and lead us in to simplicity and depth, purity and holiness, so that we may be healed and united, O Christ our Lord. Amen

4

Hidden Wisdom of God

Scripture: I Cor. 2:1-13

Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, not the wisdom of this age, not the wisdom of the dethroned rulers of this age, but rather the wisdom of God in a Mystery hidden away which God had fore-ordained before the ages for the glory of man. (2:6-7)

St. Paul makes a distinction between academic brilliance, and the profound and hidden dimensions of the Gospel. The wisdom of the rulers of this age is simply worldly wisdom, political sagacity and economic astuteness. Such wisdom is often successful but always unenduring. It can only last for a while; for it belongs to the dethroned gods like Fortune and Pluto.

There is a deeper dimension to the Gospel, however. Not all Christians are aware of this. It is simply this. God has chosen man, this insignificant and pathetic creature, to be the inheritor of God's universe, to bear the full glory of God. That is the deeper meaning of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

But not all can understand what this means and what this implies. We are to reign with Christ. We are to share in Christ every way. We are to be transformed and transfigured into the very image which he manifested on the mount of transfiguration. "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has the mind of man conceived, the treasure God has kept for those who love Him".

As we grow in the spirit, we comprehend the magnitude of this heritage. But it is not to be cut into millions of pieces, so that each of us can have a share. No, as one Church, as one Body of Christ we have to come into this inheritance.

Prayer: Lord, deliver us from the pettiness of our life's ambitions. Whatever we hope to achieve in this world, how insignificant it is compared to what thou has kept in store for us! Give us the spirit that we may see the magnitude of Thy Gift and calling. Amen.

5

Discerning by the Holy Spirit

Scripture: I Cor. 2:14 - 3:4

A man who lives by his appetites cannot receive the things belonging to God's Spirit. To him it is all foolishness; and how can he understand, for they are discerned only by the Spirit: A man who lives by the spirit discerns all things, though he himself is not discerned by others (2:14-15).

One of the hardest things to know in life is: What is worth working for? To what purpose does man exist? The "natural" man (The Greek says "psychic" man, or man, who lives by the appetites of his soul) hankers after that which will satisfy his appetites : Appetites for food, drink, shelter, glory, praise, power, pleasure, aggression, acquisitiveness and so on. And while one is engrossed in the pursuit of these, the things of the spirit appear foolish, old-fashioned, pious, non-sense to him.

But St. Paul says man can find his true *métier* only when he has discerned the tremendous treasure that God has in store for man – his transfiguration into the fullness of the power, love, wisdom and holiness of God. If only the Corinthian Christians knew the dimensions of this gift of the spirit, they would not go on squabbling about their denominational distrust and special contributions.

So long as we are having our petty denominational jealousy and strife, we are not even living at the level of appetite. We are carnal (*sarkikoi*) (3:3). It is not even a refined soul, but crude flesh that was behind the partisan wranglings of the Corinthian Christians (3:4).

Prayer: O God and Lord, deliver us from our petty denominational rivalries and quarrels.
help us to become sober and discerning.
May we grasp the immensity of Thy gift and
from it gain perspective to understand and
transcend the jealousies and strifes of this world. Amen.

6

Building for Eternity

Scripture: 1 Cor. 3:5-15

He who plants and he who waters are the same. Each shall receive his own wage according to his own work. All of us are co-workers with God. The field is God's - the house being built is God's - and that house also you are (3:7-9).

The Church is a growing organism. It is a plant that grows, it is a house that is being built. But we Christians are both part of the plant and those who tend the plant, part of the house and workers who are building the house. Our individual contribution is our work; the growth is of the whole plant, the whole house. Our work is different but all of it goes to water the plant of the Church, to build the house of God which we as a community are. True, we receive wages according to our individual labour; but collectively we all benefit from the work of each and each from the work of all.

More important than the wage is the question of what you achieve by your work, and what happens to your work in the final test: Will it endure? Or is it just ephemeral, trendy. Fashionable and merely important-sounding? This is a question to be asked by all who are engaged in the ecumenical movement. Is it wood, hay and stubble we are building? Or is it gold, silver and diamonds? Is it too easy? If so, we are far from building for eternity, in all likelihood.

St. Paul's work has endured the test of time, but not that of his calumniators and detractors.

Prayer: Grant me, O God, that I may build at some cost to myself and that my work may endure in thy edifice. Deliver me, O Christ, from all superficiality and light-heartedness in building thy body, the temple of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

7

You are God's Temple

Scripture: I Cor 3 : 16-23

Don't you know that you together are God's temple? And that the spirit of God makes his home in all of you together? If anyone dares to disintegrate the temple of God, God will disintegrate him. For God's temple is holy, which holy temple you together are (3: 16-17).

St. Paul does not say that each individual Christian separately constitute the temple of God. You (plural) are God's temple (singular) that is what he says. And it is not my Church or your Church. There is only one temple in which God dwells: the one Church. Whatever our life can contribute, it is towards the building of that one Church, because it is the edifice which would endure even when all our technological civilization has already kissed the dust.

If you introduce into that temple our personal jealousies and rivalries, we are trying to disintegrate the unity of the one temple. The consequence is that we will destroy ourselves or as St. Paul says God will destroy us.

The most powerful form of this personal rivalry is always the claim to superior knowledge. In every church situation, it is this claim that has brought about schism. And then, amidst rival claims to superior wisdom, the people fall unawares into the trap of saying Apollos is more brilliant and more convincing than Paul - and schism has already begun.

This is why St. Paul warns especially not to boast about men (v.21.) After all, who is St. Paul and who is Apollos - they are all but members of that same body, not leaders of two rival factions. And so are Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine of Hippo, Luther and Calvin. If we are Christians, then we can boast only in Christ, who is God's. Him God has given to man, that in Him man may possess all.

Prayer: O God, give us perspective; grant us the vision of thy one holy temple, so that we may no longer boast about men and cause schism in thy Church! Grant us vision, make us sane; heal us and unite us, O Lord. Amen.

8

Not Verbal Brilliance

Scripture: I Cor.4: 1-21

Some are so bubbling with pride, as if I were not coming to see you. I am coming quite soon, if the Lord allows. And when I come I want to see not the gift of gab of these bubbling babblers, but their spiritual power, for the kingdom of God is not a matter of verbal brilliance, but of power (4:18-20).

Is n't that our problem in the Church - so much verbal gymnastics, and so little real dynamic power of God? How did the gospel spread in the first centuries? Because of great rhetoricians? Or because there were men who could say to a paralytic "Silver and gold I have none, but that which I have I give you, In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazereth, walk"(Acts 3:6)? Who were the great missionaries: men of words or men of God's power? Why is our gospel so incredible today? Is it not because our spiritual power cannot match our verbal production?

Those who created divisions in the church of Corinth were either great rhetoricians or their partisans. It is not the lack of a relevant theology that weakens the Church so much as the absence of authentic, convincing manifestation of the powers of the kingdom.

Theologies come and go. Their ideas flourish for a generation or two in the seminaries and lecture halls; and we get completely misled by the novelty and brilliance of the theologian's words. The power of the martyr who did not fear to lay down his life for the Gospel, the courage of the man of God whose own personal life is a sacrament of the Gospel- that is what carried conviction in the past, and that is what the ecumenical movement must manifest, if it is the movement of the Kingdom.

Prayer: O lord, save us from empty words and meaningless hobbies. Make us slow to speak, deep of life and full of quiet and controlled power. Breath upon us a fresh mind of Thy Spirit, that the chaff may be blown away and the seminal power of the gospel come to light!! Amen

9

Feast of Sincerity and Honesty

Scripture: I Cor. 5:1-13

Christ, our paschal lamb, has been offered up in sacrifice. Let us therefore celebrate the great feast not with the old yeast of sin and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and honesty (5:7-8).

St. Paul chastises the Christian community of bragging about themselves while tolerating a glaring case of incest.

We make the forgiveness of sins too easy in our churches. Compassion for the sinner is christian, but not an easy tolerance of sin. It is for the sake of the community and its values that the glaring case of open sin has to be punished primarily. But it is also for the salvation of the sinner. Easy tolerance is good neither for the sinner nor for the community.

Ancient Roman society was quite tolerant, very much like our own, especially in matters of sexual sins. In some ways it is better to be tolerant than to be hypocritical. But the tolerance of the Church in regard to sexual sins had an invigorating effect on decadent Roman society. We cannot today blindly imitate that intolerance. Yet we need to be more bold and less trendy and permissive in regard to all sin and evil, whether personal or social. That is the salt of the church. And we are fast losing the saltiness by our eagerness to accommodate.

Moral discipline and honest, sincere human relations do not always go together. But true unity demands that unlikely combination, a genuine morality without hypocrisy.

Prayer: Lord, teach us to be compassionate towards the sinner, and yet not too easily tolerant of sin. Deliver us from the temptation to regard the practice of the majority as the standard for conduct. Help us at the same time to be sincere, open and unhypocritical, that we may truly be united. Amen.

10

Not by Popular Standards

Scripture: I Cor. 6: 1-8

Don't you know that the holy men of God are to judge the world? And if you among yourselves have to judge the world, are you incapable of judging trivial matters?....To file a suit against your brother is itself a defeat for you. Why don't you simply accept the injustice? Why don't you let the other one take advantage of you a bit? (6:2 and 7).

On the one hand the Church has a duty to judge: judge and discern what is good, what is true, what is beautiful. Without such judgment the Church cannot lead. But often the Church is too anxious to be judged by the standards of the world. We count our success in terms of buildings built, number of personnel employed, number of publications, public recognition by important people and international organizations etc. Often we jump on the band wagon of the latest secular idea in order to be regarded as up to date and to be recognized. As a Church, we are much too often afraid to speak out the unpopular truth. We give ourselves to be judged by the popular standards of the secular world, and in that process the Church seems to lose its saltiness.

There is something equally pathetic in the clamour for religious liberty. Why not let ourselves be opposed and oppressed a bit by the secular world? Are we not too soft as Christians in those countries where we have the utmost religious liberty?

When Christians as individuals and the Church as such think primarily of one's own legal rights, without a certain willingness to be abused by the secular world or by other human beings something goes wrong in our Christian stance.

Prayer: Lord, deliver us from the temptation to be always thinking in terms of our rights and privileges, either as churches or as Christians. Grant us the moral courage to face opposition where necessary and yet not to lose our saltiness, Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

11

Know the Good and do it

Scripture: I Cor. 6: 9-20

Everything is legitimate for me, but not everything is beneficial. Even if it is legitimate, I won't let anything enslave me. Food for the stomach and the stomach for food - but neither shall dominate me, for God will annul both (6:12-13).

The Corinthians must have quoted back some of St. Paul's own words to him. The Christian is under no external law. The principle of his righteousness is not conformity to a law imposed from outside (like the law of Moses) but the spirit of God who dwells inside one and prompts one to create the good.

So what if I live in sexual promiscuity, or occasionally go to a prostitute? (v.v. 15,16) In Corinth, where the temple on the hill once boasted of thousands of temple-prostitutes, that was not a shocking question, nor an unusual practice, even among certain types of so-called Christians.

St. Paul's reply illustrates the fundamental principle of Christian ethics. The Christian is not to conform to any external law. But his conduct shall be governed by the nature of his being. The tree shall be known by its fruit. Act in consonance with the being God has bestowed on you. That is Christian ethics.

Yes, we are free from the law - whether it be the law of Moses or the Victorian code - but not free to contradict our being. That is where the faculty of judgement - of discerning the good - has to function. What is the good? No external law can tell you. It is your job to create the good by the way you live.

And let us not deceive ourselves, St. Paul was no Victorian. Neither was he "conservative" in sexual morality and man-woman relationships as some would like to regard him. "Don't fool yourselves. The fornicator, the idolater, the adulterer, the pervert, the homosexual, the thief, the avaricious, the drunkard, the abuser, the robber - these are not acting in character with the inheritors of the kingdom of God". (6:9-10)

Prayer: Lord, grant us strength to discern the good, and to do it.
Amen.

12

Marriage or Celibacy

Scripture: I Cor. 7: 1-16

The wife does not have authority over her own body, but rather the husband. So also the husband does not hold authority over his own body, but rather the wife. Do not refuse each other, except by mutual agreement for a fixed period in order to devote yourself to prayer. Then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through your incontinence (7: 4-5).

This is no conservative doctrine on the man-woman relationships. In the first place, it affirms the full equality of women with men. The husband's body belongs to the wife and she has a rightful claim to it. Man-woman relationship is not to be dominated by man, woman being delegated to a passive role.

Secondly, the question of celibacy or virginity being superior to the married life is raised here by St. Paul. But his answer has to be clearly understood. He does not say that celibacy is superior. He insists that it is a vocation and a gift (v. 7) not so much an individual choice or something required by law from priests. If it is a gift, then the question of superiority does not arise.

In our present ecumenical situation, we need to affirm several things: (a) Marriage is good. It is not an inferior estate to that of celibacy. (b) Celibacy is a vocation and a gift, but the final decision about it should not be taken too early in life. It is too unfair to young seminarians to take vows of perpetual celibacy. One needs to be at least 30 before one can make such a decision. Enforced clerical celibacy may thus be placing too much of a temptation before young people, against which St. Paul warns us (v.5, v.9) (c) Celibacy should not be regarded as shameful or abnormal. It should be possible for the many women, especially in the west whom circumstances lead into a single life, to choose celibacy as a vocation in the service of the Church and of mankind. Real vocations to celibacy are perpetually necessary for the Church as an eschatological witness.

Prayer:

Lord, whether in the married life or in the vocation of celibacy, grant us that we may not sully the sacredness of the man-woman relationship by our selfishness, aggression and acquisitiveness. Amen

13

We belong to a different World

Scripture: I Cor. 7:17-39

“The scheme of this world is transient. I would like you to be free from anxiety. The unmarried man can be fully concerned about the things of the Lord, and seeks to please him alone. The married man has to worry about worldly affairs, and seeks always to please his wife. And the same with unmarried women and maids” (7:31b-34).

Being free from anxiety is the *sine qua non* of the life of faith. To be weighed down with vague anticipations of calamity destroys life in Christ. This applies both to the married and the unmarried. The single person can sometimes be just as worried and pre-occupied as the married person.

But there is a flexibility and mobility that comes easier to the single person in the service of the Lord. If he or she is resting in the Lord and not too pre-occupied with petty worries, he or she can render the kind of suffering service which married people would find it difficult to give.

St. Paul's thinking here is coloured, of course, by the expectation of a period of acute distress and severe persecution (v. 31b). We might today be more inclined to take time for granted. The consequence often is that we have a comfortable bourgeois Christianity which lacks all passion and is such a bore. Perhaps we need a little distress to wake us up.

The form of this world is passing away and our culture tries its best to make us forget that fact. Here we have no continuing city - not even a secular city. We belong to a different world. We are but pilgrims and exiles. In the ecumenical movement we often forget that, and before we know it, the movement has become institution and the spirit has flown.

Prayer: Lord, grant us the true perspective of Thy kingdom, that our values may be revolutionized. Deliver us from our love of comfort, and let us not too easily settle down to enjoy the life of comfort and affluence. Shake our false foundation, that we may seek our true foundation in Thee. Amen.

14

Acting out of Faith and Love

Scripture: 1 Cor. 8: 1-13

Food, whether we eat it or not, cannot commend us to God. If we don't eat, that does not mean we lack something; nor if we eat, do we necessarily commit excess. Only make sure that your individual freedom does not become a scandal to the weak" (8: 8-9).

The question the Corinthians had asked St. Paul was not about fasting, but about taking part in pagan temple feasts. The Christian is free. He can even take part in a religious ceremony in a pagan temple, if he is sure that he would not thereby be straying away from Christ. The same thing applies to personal ethics. The mature Christian can do many things without thereby incurring sin, if he acts out of faith and love.

But that is not the only criterion of personal ethics. No man is an island. I have to be concerned about the consequence of my free action on the lives and choices of others. Especially if I am regarded as a man of knowledge and authority, then my actions have a very high standard-setting or scandalizing power. And I need to give just as much attention to how others would regard my action as I do to my personal conscience. Certain things which my conscience would normally allow me to do, I cannot do for fear of its adverse effect on the less mature. In such cases it becomes necessary for my conscience itself to take this latter factor fully into account. My conscience should never allow me to wound the conscience of others. Personal freedom is not an absolute one in Christian ethics.

Prayer: Lord, grant us wisdom and courage, not only to do what seems to us right, but to take into account the conscience of others. Help us not to hurt others by our free actions. Amen.

15

Pressure from Within

Scripture: I Cor. 9: 1-18

If I proclaim the Gospel, it is not to brag about my achievements. It is a pressure from within me. Pity me if I don't preach the Gospel. (v. 16)

The point of St. Paul in this passage is a bit complex. He says first that as a Christian evangelist he has certain rights and privileges. He can marry, he can have a decent salary, and maintain a fairly comfortable standard of living. The other apostles, including Peter, are married, and travel with their wives even in their evangelistic ministry. St. Paul can do the same if he wants to.

But, for the sake of greater mobility, for the sake of being more free to face persecution and torture and arrest, he has decided to remain unmarried and poor, not depending on a salary, but earning a living by working with his own hands. This is a man's or a woman's choice, not a necessity in order to be a worker of the Kingdom.

The most important thing is this. If it is the prestige and salary that a minister of the Kingdom enjoys which draws one to that vocation, one is unfit for it. It must be an inner urge, a necessity that springs from the freedom of the inner man, that should propel us into the work of Christ. And this applies particularly to those who work in the ecumenical movement. If only we had more men driven by the inner compulsion of the Spirit, to work in our World and National Councils, we would soon see the difference in the quality of ecumenical work.

Prayer: Lord, quicken us by Thy spirit, that all our passions may be directed towards the mission and unity of Thy Church. Grant us vision and the drive of the Spirit. Amen.

16

Christian Athletes

Scripture: 1 Cor 9: 19-27

Don't you know that in the stadium while many compete in the races, only one receives the laurel crown? We Christians are also athletes in training, running to obtain a crown, and all athletes who compete have to keep themselves strictly disciplined (9: 24- 25).

The Corinthian Christians had so much in common with our own world. They belonged to the final stages of the Roman civilization, where the strain of achievement was leading to a life of ease and comfort and an easier Christianity, with more ethical permissiveness and cosy compromises with comfort, made a quick appeal to the flesh of a tired civilization. Much of the division in Corinth was caused by the peddlers of an easy Christianity.

The early Christian Church did become the salt of the earth and quickened the lives of men in a tired and disintegrating civilization characterized by a psychology of military conquests and spectacular achievements but empty within. That was because the Christians were a disciplined community, toughened by opposition and persecution, transfigured by the experience of authentic worship.

Today Christians balk at opposition, are dispirited when their message is unpopular and do not want the boat to be rocked. And we gripe about the lack of relevance. How can a comfortable, bourgeois, slogan-shouting Christianity without the toughness drawn from opposition and unprepared to bear the scandal of unpopularity ever be relevant and true to the Gospel?

Prayer: Lord, deliver us from our love of comfort and ease, Toughen us in battle, that we may not balk at the cross of opposition and unpopularity. Give us genuineness of conviction, and the strength of a disciplined life of worship. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

17

Warning for Christians

Scripture: 1 Cor.10: 1-13

So any body who feels he is strong in his Christian faith; be watchful to see that he does not fall. The testing and trials you face come, after all, from men. But it is, God whom we can trust, who will see to it that the trial does not exceed your capacity to take it. He will, right within the trial, show you also the way out, so that you don't need to fall (10:12-13)

Many Christians ask: will only Christians be saved? St. Paul here raises a different question: Will all Christians be saved? And his answer is: there is no such guarantee. A Christian can destroy himself if he is not careful. By a subtle analogy, he says all Israel were baptized and took communion, and were given the Spirit, the water of life. But by their lust and idolatry many perished in the desert, before getting to the promised land.

And Christians are forewarned here. Baptized Corinthian Christians, who had participated in the Eucharist, were destroying themselves by their idolatrous love of sensual pleasures and by their mutual rivalries and hatreds. It is a warning for the Church today too. Idolatry of money and power, lust and sensuality, love of ease and comfort, all these can still destroy Christians. In the Church especially among the leadership, we have to be careful, for the temptations are often much too subtle for us to recognize them as such. Let us not put our trust either in our own position in the Church or in the ecumenical movements, nor let us be dispirited by the opposition and the lack of public acclaim. Let us labour on, for He is faithful.

Prayer: Lord, in Thee and Thee alone, do we put our trust. Movements and positions are in time and space, but Thou alone are eternally trustworthy. Deliver us from the subtle temptations of pride of place and fear of opposition. Make us good and tough athletes who can stand the test and find our way out of temptation. In Christ. Amen.

18

We are one in Christ

Scripture: 1 Cor. 10: 14 – 11: 1

The Eucharistic Bread is one, and we the many are but one body, for all of us commune in the same bread. (10:7)

How hard is that for us to grasp! Our separate individual and collective egos (as nations, churches, tribes, linguistic or provincial groups etc.) are so obvious to us. But we cannot see in what sense, we, the whole Church, and in a sense, the whole of humanity, are just one single corporate entity. That however, happens to be our true reality, not our separateness. When we shall cast off our terrestrial bodies, the mark of sin and separation, and shall put on our resurrection bodies, then we shall see that we are truly one, with a common mind, held together by love, and by our adoration of the one Lord.

It is this ultimate reality which should be experienced both in the Eucharist and in the ecumenical movement. It is this reality of our oneness which should find expression in our love and concern for each other (v. 24). My spiritual goal in the Church is not building myself up, but the building up of the whole body.

And that too is the principle of the Christian ethic, as well as of true freedom. We go wrong when we see the Christian life in terms merely of an individual morality or personal freedom. The genuine principle is mutual love in freedom, which is concerned most about the mutual building up of the whole Church and the whole of humanity - also of our immediate community, be it the family or the local church.

Prayer: Deliver us, O Lord, from the ego-consciousness that stems from our separation. Break the bonds of our individualistic alienation. Teach us to enter into others in love, there to find our true self, which is Jesus Christ. Grant us vision; grant us depth of understanding; grant us love that we may be truly free and truly one. Through Christ, by Thy Spirit. Amen.

19

Man and Woman: Complementary Halves

Scripture: I Corinthians 11: 2-16

In the Lord there is neither woman without man, nor man without woman. Just as woman was taken out of man, so also man is born out of a woman. And both are from God (11:11).

How much this passage of St. Paul has been discussed out of context! And how relevant it is to the life of the Church today.

Man and woman are not two separate classes but complementary halves of what together makes man. Our churches have become, while remaining preponderantly woman-attended, intolerably man-dominated. Major decisions are taken by a majority of men, thus laying waste all the rich gifts of imagination and compassion that are more natural to women.

The recovery of the full place of women in the Church, as baptized members, anointed to Christ's priesthood, can bring about a new and renewing dimension of vitality to our churches.

The point about covering the head in Church has today become somewhat obscure. In Corinthian society, there was a particular type of women, with bobbed hair and uncovered heads, who were the symbols of sexual immorality. In our society, the short hair and the unveiled head need not symbolize anything of the kind.

The important thing is the meaning behind the veil or the covering of the head. Modesty, humility and purity were symbolized by it. If we all, whether we be men or women, bring this to Church, the covering or uncovering of the head becomes of much less importance. Very few modern hats worn by women can convey that meaning, even symbolically.

The gathering of the community for worship is always a foretaste of our ultimate existence. There, there is a mutual submission, without enslavement or loss of liberty, with full dignity – woman to man, all women and men to Christ, and Christ with his Church to God the father. Christ is equal to the Father. And yet he submits. We need also to learn to submit in love without loss of dignity and freedom.

Prayer: O God, teach us to submit with dignity and freedom, that unity may be preserved in love. Amen.

Tradition received from the Lord

Scripture: I Cor. 11:17-26

It is a tradition I have received from the Lord, which I have in turn handed over to you, that the Lord Jesus, during the night of his betrayal, took bread, made the Eucharist (thanksgiving), broke it, and said, “This is my Body which is for you. This you must do in order to recall me”. (11:23)

The Eucharistic Assembly in Corinth was the occasion when the wranglings and divisions in the Church most clearly came to light. There must have been groups assembling separately to celebrate the Eucharist, excluding some others. (The word schism is used in verse 18). And St. Paul says that this he partly believes, for heresy and division are occasions to distinguish between the genuine and the false.

But the Apostle warns the Christians of Corinth that the Eucharist is to be used to express unity and concord. It is a precious tradition in Christ’s Church, which sustained it from the beginning, long before the New Testament came to be written or compiled. In this great mystery we enter with Christ, whom we recall therein, into the very august presence of God Himself. Here the union with Christ becomes consummated, for His Body is given for us, and we became incorporated in Him.

It is the mystery of unity, the Sacrament of our union, with Christ and with each other. It is our entering into our ultimate destiny to be one with Him and in Him.

And yet, here is where our disunity is most manifest. Even in the communion within one Church, we do not forgive, we do not open our hearts to our fellow men, we do not experience the reality of our union with Christ and with each other.

The day must come when we shall all be once again united in the Eucharist. But it will come only when love becomes more adequate, when the social, economic and other divisions which separate men are overcome, and all have a deeper understanding of this central mystery of our faith.

On Choosing the Good Portion

Until that day we must all bear the pain of our separation and labour to remove it.

Prayer: O Lord our God, Jesus Christ, who died and rose again in order that we may become one in Thy Body, break the walls that separate us and lead us into Thy unity, that we may all be one Body by partaking together of Thy Body and Blood. Amen.

21

Lord cleanse us by Thy Spirit

Scripture : 1 Cor. 11:27-34

Let each man test himself, and only thus should he eat from the bread and drink from the cup. For anyone eating and drinking without discerning what the Body is, will be eating and drinking for his own condemnation (11:28-29).

To participate in the Body and Blood of our Lord should fill us with awe. He the Son of God, pure and sinless, who became one of us, without sin, draws us into His own Holy Body. The God-man comes to dwell in us, we hold Him within us as in a temple. We become one with Him as Body and members. His blood mingles with ours and cleanses us from all sin. His Body brings His Spirit into our bodies and makes the Spirit our true life.

Ah, the greatness of his grace, the limitlessness of his love! What tongue can describe it! He gives Himself to us in the Body and the Blood! Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof! Lord, be merciful to me a sinner! How can I ever be worthy of Thy mercy! If I examine myself, I can only condemn myself. I shall never regard myself worthy of approaching Thy Holy throne. Woe is me, I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell amidst an unholy people.

Prayer: Have mercy upon us, Lord! Forgive us, cleanse us by Thy Spirit, and deign to enter our humble bodies, there to abide and there to rule. May Thy life be my life. I give my all, sin and dirt as it is, to Thee. Take me and make me Thine. Break me if need be, but make me anew, that I may become Thy Holy Temple, along with my fellow Christians. Rule in us, Lord, let Thy love reign supreme in us and make us all one with Thee, and with Thy Father, through Thy Holy Spirit. Amen

Confessing Christ in the Sprit of God

Scripture: I Cor. 12:1-13

So, let me assure you, that no man speaking in the Sprit of God can say: “Jesus is accursed”. And except in the Spirit of God no one can confess and say “Jesus is Lord” (12:2).

This was in reply to a question about the various functions of the Holy Spirit. And with the twelfth chapter of I Corinthians, St. Paul begins to relate the Eucharist to the gifts of the Spirit in the Body to love as the binding force in the Body, and to the Resurrection as the source of our life and hope.

The first three verses speak about the action of the Spirit in the life of the martyr (witness). In times of persecution Christians were constrained to say that Jesus is accursed and to acknowledge that the Roman Emperor is Lord. This was because the Roman Government suspected Christians to be disloyal to the Emperor, and loyal to another Lord called Jesus. Corinthian Christians were generally comfort-loving and sometimes sought to escape persecution by repeating the formulas administered by the magistrate – “Jesus is accursed; and the Emperor is Lord”. St. Paul says, if you really have the Spirit of God in you, you will never say Jesus is accursed even if it costs you your life. And it takes the power of the Spirit to confess that Jesus is Lord, in the presence of the magistrate, knowing that the confession would lead to flogging, torture, being thrown to the wild animals or death by hanging.

Our evangelism, our confessing the Lord in public, becomes inauthentic precisely because it costs us nothing, and we do not need to depend upon the Holy Spirit to say that Jesus is Lord.

Prayer: Lord, our witness has become flat; our words and actions no longer have power; we have forgotten what it means to suffer for Thy name’s sake. Give us Thy Spirit that He may speak His language through our lives and lips. In Christ, Amen.

23

One Spirit, Many Gifts

Scripture: 1 Cor. 12:4-31

Distinctions between gifts there are; but the Spirit behind all gifts is one and the same. There are also distinctions between the various forms of service, but the Lord who serves is the same. And there are distinctions between the various activities but the God who acts through all existence is one and the same (12: 4-6).

The Corinthians were basically individualists – competitive, demonstrative, extrovert. And the Church became an arena of competitive demonstrativeness. There was the most spectacular of all gifts of the Spirit – speaking in tongues. There was also prophecy – not as prosaic as our present-day sermons, but the spirit-inspired teaching of the Church to build it up in the faith.

And the Corinthians had an on-going debate on which of these is the superior gift : speaking in tongues or teaching of the church. In order to answer this question St. Paul begins by saying:

(a) the most primary gift is the Spirit-given courage to trust in Christ and confess him without fear (12:1-3).

(b) Secondly, all gifts are given to individuals for the sake of the Body, and not for the individual's own sake. So no one need boast about his gifts.

The Body is one. The task of the whole Body is one. We, whether we be individuals or denominations, can have no significance at all except in relation to that Body. Despite the multiplicity of members, the Body is one (v. 12). And Christ exists always with His Body, the Church. The Spirit dwells in the Body which is united to Christ.

It is ridiculous then for individuals and denominations today to vie with each other and boast about their special contributions. What we need to recover is the fullness of the Spirit's gifts to the Church, and the realization that there is nowhere we can belong except to the one Body of Christ.

Prayer: Lord, refine our minds to see beyond the evidence of our senses, and to grasp the reality of our union to Christ and our existence in the one Church. Amen.

24

Love is Eternal

Scripture: 1 Cor. 13:1-13

Love suffers long; love melts with mercy. Love never goes with jealousy; neither can love boast about itself; it does not spout empty words or behave unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, nor goes into paroxysms of rage, does not calculate to do evil, does not rejoice in injustice done to others; love joins in the joy of the just and the true. Love is tough and can endure all things; love trusts all and hopes for all. Love disciplines itself (13:4-7).

Which is the higher gift? speaking in tongues or teaching the Church? The first answer of St. Paul - neither is any good without the primary gift of the Holy Spirit, the love that He pours out into our hearts.

And what is this love? Not a soft, smooth, sophisticated, sticky sentimentality. It is tough and willing to suffer. It is full of compassion and anxious always to serve the lonely and the lost, the poor and the oppressed, to take on their suffering on oneself, to weep with the suffering and to rejoice with the rejoicing. It is honest and open, anxious not to hurt except to heal, never calculating to do evil to others. Unable to boast of its own superiority or to seek pride of place or privilege and power.

This is the great energy released in the world by God in Christ through the Spirit. It is this primary gift of God which must overcome evil and establish the good. Love is the true secret of unity; and lack of love is behind every event of disunity.

Faith and hope are time-realities, by which we participate in the transcendent world beyond the veil of vision. They will no longer be necessary when time itself shall vanish and we shall be in the majestic presence without the time-space veil. But love is eternal – for love is God.

Prayer: O God who is love, may we know Thy love that we may learn to love! Pour forth Thy love in Thy Church that all disunity be banished from it. By Christ, through Thy Spirit. Amen.

25

Early Pattern of Worship

Scripture: 1 Cor. 14: 26-40

So, my brethren earnestly desire to prophesy, do not forbid speaking in tongues. But all things should be done with decorum and in an orderly manner (14 :39-40).

The worship of the earliest church, at least in Corinth, was probably quite different from ours. The first part, the *sunaxis*, or the coming together for the hearing of the word, was a rather spontaneous, turbulent, dynamic, awesome affair. The spirit was anticipated, and He was present in the community. The singing of hymns and psalms was a genuine act of praise from the heart, not the regimented and soulless affair it has become today. The Old Testament Scriptures were read from a scroll, and someone had to interpret the meaning. Since the New Testament did not exist, they narrated the words of our Lord from memory and recounted his mighty acts. These too had to be interpreted. There were thus several readings and narratives with several interpretatory sermons.

Then followed the prayers. These were spontaneous and largely unfixed in content. The prophets were men in the community with special gifts to interpret the scriptures and to lead in prayer. When the spirit moved them, the truth of Jesus Christ was manifested in new and unexpected forms. When they prayed, the depths of men were touched, the heavens were opened, and the community entered joyfully into the presence of God. When they preached, the words of the Lord transformed the congregation, nurtured the people and built them into the Body of Christ.

But it was not chaotic. The spirit gradually revealed its own order and a pattern of worship soon emerged, with surprising similarity of form, in Jerusalem and Cappadocia, in Corinth and Crete, in Alexandria and Rome.

Prayer: Lord, lead us by Thy spirit into that pattern of worship which combines spontaneity with order, vitality with regularity and power with pattern, that Thy Church may truly be built up, in Christ. Amen.

26

The Eucharist and the Gospel

Scripture: 1 Cor. 15: 1 -11

What I handed over to you at the beginning was exactly what I had myself been handed - the tradition that Christ died on behalf of our sins according to the scriptures, that he was entombed, and that he rose again on the third day as the scriptures said he would; that he was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve (15 : 3-5).

The Gospel is part of the tradition of the Church, along with the Eucharist. St. Paul refers to two things which he has received from the Lord - the tradition of the Eucharist (1 Cor. 11:21 ff) and the tradition of the Gospel (15: 3 ff). And there is no choice for the Church but to stay with these two. Lose the Eucharist, and Christianity becomes moralist, intellectualist, and soon non-existent. Lose the Gospel of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, Christianity becomes secular, humanist, liberal, and no longer Christianity.

We cannot modernize these two fundamentals. We can only celebrate the Eucharist with joy, in our own forms, and proclaim the gospel with faith and love. There is no need to sacrifice our rationality to hold on to these. Neither is there any need to water them down to the level of ritual and literature.

From its inception these were the two great motors of the Ecumenical movement - the Eucharist and the study of the Bible. Their importance would now seem to be on the wane. And in the same measure the ecumenical movement slips into jargon and gimmicks to show itself alive. The recovery of worship and the common study of the Bible together alone can restore the tone of authenticity to our prolific products in verbiage and activism.

Prayer: Lord, look down in pity on the emptiness of our common life as Christians. Restore unto us the life of the spirit by Thy Word· and by Thy body and blood. Amen.

Christ's Bodily Resurrection

Scripture: 1 Cor. 15 : 12-28

If Christ did not really rise from the dead, our proclamation is but empty falsehood, and so is your faith. We would then be found to be false witness of God in that we claim that God raised up Christ, when he did not as these men say, the dead are never to be raised up (15:14-15).

The belief in Christ's bodily resurrection is the kingpin of the Christian faith. If that is denied, or explained away by sophologisms like 'faith-event' and so on, the basis for the Christian hope is gone. Christ then becomes just another teacher around whom a good deal of myth and legend grew up.

Our modern deniers of the physical resurrection of Christ and of ourselves, had their prototypes in Corinth. These were sophisticated, rational men, who thought they were intelligent enough not to believe in the physical resurrection either of Christ or of the Christians. But if they were really rational, they should also have seen that there was no rational ground for them to continue to claim to be Christian when they had denied the central tenet of the Christian faith.

Verse 19 is the main thrust of the passage. If the Christian message is to be secularised to the extent that the resurrection is denied and all salvation is to be understood in terms of this world and our premortem life alone, then we Christians should really be pitied for holding on to such a ridiculous faith built on martyrdom, the blood of men and women who sincerely believed that through death they entered into a greater life.

Prayer: O God deliver us from the temptation to escape the scandal of Thy Cross and Resurrection. Help us to put our trust in Him whom Thou didst raise up on the Third day. Teach us to look forward to the resurrection of our own bodies. Amen.

28

Inherit the eternal Kingdom

Scripture: 1 Cor. 15:29-50

The first man was made out of the dust of the earth, we the second man came from heaven ...Just as we bore the image of the dust-man we shall also bear the image of the heavenly man. This I affirm, brothers, it is not flesh and blood that can inherit the eternal kingdom of God; the perishable cannot come into possession of the imperishable (15:49-50).

The Church's teaching is beyond doubt. Our bodily structure has to pass through death and be reconstituted into an imperishable body not weighed down by death and gravity. The resurrection and the ascension of Christ are pointers in that direction.

The unity of the Church, the one body of Christ, is a reality belonging to that realm of the resurrection. Here in this sphere of time, we are living a false life, if we fail to choose that reality and live it here. Our petty parochialisms arising out of sinful egoism must end somewhere, because they are banal lies, creations of evil, which must be burnt up on the day of judgment.

The second Man, the Man from heaven, the man who had gone into heaven to intercede for us - he is a corporate man. He has chosen not to live for himself but to live for us and in us. That is the basis of the unity of the Church.

Prayer : O Christ, our Lord, in whom alone we can inherit the imperishable kingdom, help us to see that our fellowmen are joint heirs with us in one body, the Church. Help us to overcome our divisioness and live the truth of our being in Thee. Amen

29

Faith to overcome the Fear of Death

Scripture: 1 Cor. 15 : 51-58

It is necessary that this perishable being of ours be clothed with imperishability; this death bound life must put on deathlessness.... Only when that happens will the Scripture be fulfilled. Devoured up is death in victory (Is. 25:8) “O death, where is your triumph? Where O death is your sting” (Hos. 13:14).

Death is still the great pseudo-power that rules over men. He can threaten men, and men can use the threat of death to enslave other men and destroy their dignity. And finally when some men claim “the death of God”, they are really saying that death is God, for God himself is subject to death. If death is God, then martyrdom is folly, and man is a plaything, without freedom or dignity.

If death is finally to triumph over life, suicide is the best course for men. It is only because death itself has been trampled down by the death of Christ, that we can face death without fear, and thus be free from the mighty power of the persecuting empires. It was the faith of little men who had triumphed in Christ over the fear of death that finally brought the great empire tumbling down.

Christians must not be ashamed of this triumph of Christ simply because it would be laughed at by some contemporaries. So was St. Paul laughed at. But the last laugh will be at the Resurrection, at the expense of death, that empty pseudo-power!

Prayer: O Christ, who has by death trampled down death, and has brought life and victory to light by Thy Cross and Resurrection, grant us the faith to overcome the fear of death and to live in the freedom of Thy risen life which cannot be touched by death. Amen.

30

Don't sleep and slip

Scripture I Cor. 16 : 1-24

Be alert, stand fast in the faith, act like men, discipline yourself for the struggles; Let every aspect of you be fulfilled in love. (16: 13-14)

In this concluding section St. Paul raises several matters of detail. Yet everyone of them has relevance for the life of the Church today.

First about the contribution to the Christians in Jerusalem, who were poor and in need. It was the mother Church to whom Corinth owed the gospel. It was no paternalistic aid that the apostle asked the rich Corinthians to give to the poor Palestinians. It was to be a humble offering of the daughter Church to the mother Church.

Second, St. Paul now finds a wide and effective door opened for him around Ephesus, and many adversaries contending. He is himself always watchful to see where the Lord calls him, and is not afraid of problems and difficulties.

Third, St. Paul enjoins obedience on the part of the Corinthian Christians, first to young Timothy their visiting Archbishop, (v 10) and then to Stephanas (v. 15-16) their own minister. The Church, made up of free men, yet needs this willing submission to authority.

Finally, in verses 13 and 14, St. Paul summarizes the basic elements of the Christian life - eternal alertness, not being swept away by pleasant sounding and easy gospels; fearless and firm stand in the faith; the manly willingness to endure hardship; the training in self-discipline, and above all a love that pervades all life and thought and work.

Prayer: Lord, quicken us that we may not sleep or slip into comfortable error; strengthen us that we may stand and endure hardship; train us in self-discipline, and above all, may Thy love drown us in its sweetness and cleanse us from all our softness and laziness. Amen.

Living with One Another

Most of us begin with the assumption that we are all individuals first and that each person constitutes a separate entity in oneself, who can then enter into relationships with others on the basis of one's own identity.

Is this assumption true? Am I an "independent" entity? Is my skin the limit of my personal being, beyond which I encounter "others" - either as other subjects or as "objects" outside of myself?

The question is not easy to answer. Our present scientific-technological culture is based on the assumption that the perceiving subject is independent of the "object" and therefore there can be such a thing as "objective" knowledge, which is true under all conditions irrespective of the subject. Good science itself does not make such an assumption. It is the culture that thinks of the subject as independent of other subjects and objects.

If I am a person, then I cannot exist independently of others. For the essence of personality is relationship.

If there were no other persons, I would not exist as a person, for four reasons.

(a) **I am created.** I do not have existence in myself. I did not spring out of myself. I derived my being from my parents, who in turn got theirs from their parents, until we go back to the one Who has being in Himself, who is self-existent and not created by someone else. It is because of the Creative Act of the Original Person that I exist as a person today. All created personality is derived from and contingent upon the Creator's Personhood, and is therefore not independent. . If there were not the Person of the Creator, I would not exist as a person.

(b) **My parents and Ancestors have contributed to making me what I am.**

I inherited my genes and chromosomes from my parents. These have a definitive role in making me what I am. Through the generative act, my parents have passed on to me not merely a neutral, biological instrument called the body. They have imparted to me a colour of skin and hair and eye; but they have also given to me certain personality traits and a stamp of character. Through these genes and chromosomes certain aspects of the

past history of my ancestors have been transmitted to me, thus definitely loading my personality in certain directions.

(c) All the people with whom I have had significant contact since I was born have contributed to shaping me.

No human infant can grow into a human person by simply being provided air and water and food. One could make an inhuman experiment and try to bring up a human infant “untouched by hand” without contact with other humans or with other living beings, but provided with the biological necessities of life. If the infant survives to childhood, it will be a monster in a year or two. The likelihood is that the infant would not live for more than a few weeks. If it does, it will not learn any speech, it will be capable of no relationships, it will be so totally self-centered that it can be called only a monster.

All humanity is achieved only in relation - not only language and culture, the distinctive marks of humanity, but even the capacity for relationships which even animals have, though even dogs have to acquire these socially and not by themselves.

If the foregoing is true, then I am not my own. I have been created by other people, and I am constantly in every relation contributing to “creating” other people.

(d) The history of my people and of the human race is part of my personality – in fact its foundation.

Here I am as a particular human being in this particular country of India, at this particular time - the year of Grace 1975. What I am today is partly a contribution of my history, of the geography of equatorial Kerala and of the whole history of evolution of humanity throughout its existence on the planet. Supposing I had been born and brought up in the U.S.A. in 1387, I would have been a totally different kind of Indian, bearing very little resemblance to the present me in ideas, facial features, colour of skin, language, culture etc.

Let us then give up this foolish idea that we are all self-made and self-determined individuals, who owe our individual being to no one else. Let us not try to be “self-made individuals who worship their Maker”! We are not our own. We belong to each other, we belong to Him who gave us being out of nothing. Let us not talk about one and another as if each of us is such a separate entity. It is the community which has shaped us and in which we

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can acquire and exercise our personality.

Both ontologically and existentially, the community is prior to the individual. The other way of looking at it is a particular falsehood created by the competitive ideology of capitalism in order to serve its own interests.

What about the Christian Faith? Does not the Gospel teach us the priority of persons over the community, the worth of the individual, the priority of the one lost sheep over the 99 that are not lost?

Points for Meditation

1. Do individualism and the profit motive have some relation to each other? What about competitiveness? Does capitalism encourage unhealthy individualism?

2. Does socialism promote genuine community? What is the difference between capitalism and socialism in the motivation for productive work?

3. Has our own interpretation of the Christian Gospel been influenced by either capitalism or socialism? Have we been too inclined to understand religion or the Gospel as mainly or primarily a matter of the relationship of the individual person to God?

The Parable of the Tenants

Scripture: Matthew 21:31-41.

Now in this parable of a vineyard leased out to tenant farmers, we could ask the questions: what is this vineyard? who is this landlord? who are these share-cropping tenants? And who are these slaves whom the Landlord sent to get his share of the crop?

Clearly the vineyard is the opportunity given to the people of Israel for existence in time and space, in the land of Palestine in the years before Christ, with the law and the prophets to guide them. The Landlord is clearly God the Creator to whom the land belongs; the share-cropping tenants are the people of that small nomadic tribe brought back from slavery in Egypt; the slaves sent by the Landlord are the prophets commissioned by God to demand righteousness from his chosen people.

We are also share-cropping tenant farmers on this earth. It is not our property. Neither time (history) nor space (land, geography) belongs to us; our particular portions of these were not chosen by us even. But we have an obligation to produce fruit and to offer the first fruits to God. The fruit demanded is not Gross National Product or taxes for Inland Revenue – but rather, justice, righteousness, goodness, love. We have been given all the things necessary to produce that fruit. Time, space and Revelation.

The opportunity given to human beings is the opportunity to produce the fruit of goodness and peace and justice and joy and love and mercy. This is the fruit that God demands from us. Everything that we have - life and health, the freedom to organize politically, the freedom to establish and maintain institutions (for judiciary, legislature, executive, education, health, welfare), the possibility to create art and music, dance and drama, literature and architecture, the accumulated knowledge skills provided by science and technology, the human sciences of politics and economics, anthropology and sociology, psychology and philosophy, the mass media of journalism, radio, TV, movies, and the religious experience and heritage of humanity - everything that we have is given for the purpose of producing the fruit of love, peace and joy.

All these gifts are leased out to us. All the so called achievements of

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humanity are rented out to us. These are not our permanent possessions. The eviction notice will come to us, to different people at different times, to quit this farm and go to another. And we are jointly and individually responsible to give an account of what we have done with what has been leased out to us.

To live with one another means to share this responsibility with each other, and to work as a community to fulfill our responsibility.

Points for Meditation

1. Who are the servants whom God the Landlord sends out to us (today's tenant farmers) to demand fruit from us?
2. What role can our organisations play :
 - a) in producing the fruit of love, joy and peace?
 - b) in being God's servant to make the demand for the fruit of justice and peace?
3. To what extent are we personally responsible for producing the fruit of righteousness and to what extent do we have to do it in cooperation with others?
4. Did the people of Israel have a collective responsibility to produce the fruit of justice, or was it purely an individual responsibility of each Israelite?
5. What do you think should be our responsibility towards the planet that has been given to us? Are we to dominate it in such a way that it serves our purposes? Does God care for animals, trees, and even rivers and mountains? Should we care? Why?

33

The Failure of Love

Scripture: Ephesians 4:11-16.

The unfallen state of Humanity.

(Gregory of Nyssa - 4th century.)

“Then, death was not; disease was absent; ‘mine’ and ‘thine’ - , these bad words were far from the life of the First Humans. For as the sun is common to all and so is the air, and in fact before everything else the Grace of God and His blessing was common to all; so also all could participate in all good in equal measure according to the capacity of each. The sickness of Greed was unknown. The hatred of superiors towards inferiors was not - in fact, there were no such people called superiors and inferiors.... Equality in honour to the angels, fearless access into the presence of God, the blessed vision of that Good which is above the world, the ineffable beauty of the Blessed Being of God was seen in us also - in the prime of the human soul, when it was still shining with the Glory of God”

To what purpose are the gifts of God given? Some are apostles, some are prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers. Do you think that the gifts of the spirit are for one’s personal enjoyment? What, in fact, does the Epistle to the Ephesians say about this (4:12)?

All gifts of God are for the common good and not for our own enjoyment. That is a very difficult lesson to learn for us, for we have a very individualistic understanding of the Gospel. But here the emphasis falls very heavily on the growth of the whole body of Christ, the whole community growing together into the head who is Christ.

Each part has to work properly, in order that the whole may grow in the right way (4.16). The basic principle of growth is love.

Do you think a child who does not receive any love from anyone can grow up to become a human being? Have you looked into the lives of criminals and seen that in almost every case there is a failure of love? Have you looked into divisions in churches or nations and have seen that the basic reason for the division was a failure of love?

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God is Love, and where there is a failure of love, there is disunity and disintegration. This is true of the family as it is of peoples and nations.

But it seems easier for individuals to love individuals, according to interest and taste; much more difficult it seems for groups to love each other - especially if they have a past history of mutual hatred and fighting or oppression and exploitation.

Where in the world do you see this failure of love operating among human beings? Why did Hindus and Muslims fight in India in the 1940's? Why do Jews and Arabs fight?

Would it be true to say that behind every failure of love there is also a failure of justice? Is the failure of justice usually all on one side?

Points for Meditation

1. Take the White-Black problem. What is behind the apparent failure of love? Was the failure of justice mostly on one side? Can we today as whites and blacks sit down and discuss this problem dispassionately, rationally, and objectively? If we cannot, what are the reasons?
2. Take the man-woman problem. There has been so much love between man and woman. And there has been perhaps an equal amount of failure of love between man and woman. But where in fact is the failure of love between men as a group and women as a group in our societies? Has it always been there?

34

The Old Humanity and The New

Ephesians 4:17 – 5:21

The writer of the letter to the Ephesians makes the contrast between the old humanity and the new humanity in Christ rather stark; Can we look at it in detail to see whether some or at least a few of these points are still valid for regulating our ‘life with one another?’

Old Humanity

1. Blindness as to purpose of existence, and consequent ignorance of the right way to live. (v 16 ff). Loss of meaning, futility licentiousness; lack of compassion.
2. Falsehood (v. 25) and deceitfulness, trying to get ahead of the other in individualistic competition.
3. Bitterness, anger, mutual resentment; nourishing of old grudges.
4. Stealing, exploitation. Making one's own part of the fruit of other people's labour. Production with profit motive (v. 28)
5. Talk cutting down other people, doing them damage In order to get ahead of them, to take advantage of them or to feel superior to them (v. 29).

New Humanity.

1. Vision of the Truth in Christ Jesus (v. 20-21). Christ is the likeness of God, the original image, according to which humanity is to live.
2. Truthfulness in dealing with other Human beings (v. 25). recognizing that we are members of the social body (v. 25b)
3. Reconciliation with people before the sun goes down (v. 26), so that resentments are not carried into the subconscious, thereby giving an opportunity to the devil to create new quarrels (v.21)
4. Socially oriented labour. Working not for wages or for profit, but because by working we contribute to the needs of others. (v. 28)
5. Conversation and speech oriented towards the up-building (edification), and education of society for its reorientation towards justice and peace. The Holy

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Such talk is “grieving the Holy Spirit.”

6. Malice, slander, clamour, giving in to the temptation to gossip, to speak evil of others, to rejoice, in the failures and misfortunes of others (v.31). Hatred of others.

7. Sexual immorality; i.e. 1ack of ability to control the sexual drive, and the desire to use others for one’s own gratification - in talk, look, thought and action. (v. 3-7). Preference for “night-life”, which means false and artificial stimulation of the sex instinct which is already stronger than is necessary for love and procreation.

8. Time is something’ to be “killed” or enjoyed, so that the important thing is to have a “good time” i.e. maximum profit in terms of personal enjoyment. When there is no enjoyment one is bored and depressed and vaguely anxious. Time as death-bringing (5:15-17) and therefore subconsciously threatening. Time as purposeless.

9. Drunkenness, drug addiction (5:18) itching for sensuous excitement and pleasure from food, coffee, smoke, sex. Looking for Cheap substitutes for joy in “deceitful lusts”

spirit’s gifts, are for building up the community. (v. 30)

6. Kindness, compassion, understanding, sympathy eager to forgive, reluctant to accuse (v.32), willingness to give oneself as a sacrifice for the sake of others. Love for others. (5:1-2)

7. Life in the light. All relationships are open and non-exploitative. A clean way of life in which there is nothing to hide or to be ashamed of. The Man-woman relationship is one of complementarity, mutual respect and fruitful co-creativity.

8. Time as something that needs to be “redeemed” by being used wisely. Time as opportunity for entering into creative relationships with others and serving them. Time as opportunity to do the will of God. Time as something to be used up, and its lapse as something not to be feared, because of one’s eager expectation of what is beyond time-existence. Time as intensely purposive (5:17).

9. The joy of genuine community worship (not the bureaucratic, talkative worship we have in most of our Churches) is a foretaste of the true joy in the presence of God, a joy which is lasting and which

(4:22) which never yield lasting satisfaction. Seeking for sexual pleasure as a substitute for the true joy for which humanity is made. Stimulation through spirits rather than joy in the spirit.

10. Mutual exploitation in the three fundamental relations of human existence viz. man-woman, parents-children and employer-employee (5:21- 6:9) Always trying to use the other for one's own purposes, for profit, power or gratification.

builds community a level deeper than the conscious. Rejoicing in the presence of God without lecturing him or pestering him with requests. Giving thanks for everything !

10. Mutual love and respect. Seek always to build up others. Serve others, give the possibility of existence to others. Nourishing and cherishing the other. Honouring, caring with tenderness, compassion and love.

Points for Meditation

1. Obviously most of us have more of the old humanity than the new operating in us. How do we get out of this situation and begin to “put on the new humanity”? What are the practical means available?
2. Do these principles have any social relevance, i.e. to our life with one another ? or are they mainly ways of “self improvement”
3. Are these principles not a bit too idealistic? If you live according to these principles in a selfish and unjust society will not other people take advantage of you and exploit you even more?
4. Is this not a kind of bourgeois morality? Is this not a way of escaping the real problems of fighting and struggling against poverty and injustice, against oppression and exploitation?
5. Should we forgive the oppressor or fight him? Should we be compassionate to the exploiter or use organized power to stop him? Are not these principles basically apolitical?

35

Jesus wept

Scripture: John 11:35.

Yes, the Master wept...

His very presence was enough to dry the tear-streams of a thousand grief-struck eyes. Yet now He Himself weeps at the death of a dear friend! This thirty-three-year-old Rabbi was no effeminate sentimentalist, yet behold the tears trickling from those deep-set eyes which once breathed fire against the Pharisees!

How can the Christian today say, 'Death is a blessing' when the Lord of life Himself shed tears at its sight? In the desolate home where a dear one has been cruelly caught, in the icy grip of dark death, how can a Christian minister make bold to deter the women from wailing, knowing as he does that the Master wept at Lazarus' tomb?

Was it not that the grief of separation hit the human heart of Jesus as it would strike our own hearts if we were to lose one of our own dearest? Was it not the depth of Jesus' love for Lazarus that drew out the sorrow from the depths of His soul?

At least that is what the Jews thought! Says the Evangelist: "Jesus wept". So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him'; but some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying'?

But one thing we seem to have lost sight of. For the Fourth Evangelist, 'the Jews' always manifest two dominant traits, ignorance and unbelief. 'Knew not', 'understood not' and 'believed not' are constantly said of them.

Here too, they understood not. Jesus wept. That is a statement of fact. But its meaning - that they misunderstood. For the Son of God death could hold no terror. He knew that he was Himself 'the Resurrection and the Life', and also that his father heareth him always'. He knew what he was about to do.

He wept. There is deep feeling expressed in those words. He was deeply moved. And he again, came to the tomb.

He was truly bestirred with deepfelt emotion. But not because of Lazarus' death! That is only an occasion to manifest anew the power and love of God - no time for broken- hearted wailing!

He wept, first, because He felt in his own heart the pain and sorrow of Mary and her friends. 'When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was deeply moved and troubled' There is no human sorrow that does not strike a chord of sympathetic response in the heart-strings of the Incarnate God. Jesus offered comfort to the weary and heavy-laden not through a counsel of courage or though display of stoic dispassion, but by actually bearing upon Himself our grief and sorrows. The God-man weeps to this day at the pain of the world.

But He wept also because of the predicament of man which made him weep at the sight of death! Death was the boundary of man's knowledge and striving. Thus far and no farther, said Death to man's attempt to build the tower that reaches up to heaven. To live was beyond the power of man, for the life that man was born heir to was bounded by death. It was this that made man shudder and weep at the sight of death. And it was this pathetic state of man which drew the tears from the eyes of Jesus.

Jesus wept, thirdly, because there was a way open to man to enter Life, but man in his dogged decision to trust in himself alone had chosen to turn his back on the door. This is the perennial problem of unbelief and indifference. And even today the heart of God weeps for man who is unwilling to trust him who calls. Death must still remain a terror to him who would not come to the Lord of Life. But to him who comes, the master dries His tears and says: "I am the resurrection and the Life; he who believe in me though be dead, shall live." Lord help us in our unbelief.

36

Diakonia

The context of the sons of Zebedee episode in Matthew 20 is the parable of the householder who paid the same wages to workers who spent all day in the fields as to those who worked for only an hour.

The parable ends with a curiously unjust principle. God can do with his kingdom what he likes: “Friend, I am not unjust to you. Our contract was for one denarius. Take what is yours by contract and go. But it is my will that I will give to these last ones the same one denarius I give you.

“Am I not free to give what I want to give out of my own? Are you jealous about my being good to these people? Thus the last will be first and the first will be last.”

It is important to remember this. God’s justice follows principles quite different from ours. It is also important to remember that, after having narrated this parable so offensive to our sense of justice, Jesus was about to ‘go up’ to Jerusalem for the great act of diakonia - that of laying down his life for others.

Jesus calls the Twelve aside and tells them: “Look, we are going up to Jerusalem. There the Son of Man will be betrayed and handed over to the high priest and law professors. They will condemn him to death, and will again betray and hand him over to the Gentiles, to be mocked, to be whipped and finally to be crucified. On the third day he will be resurrected.”

Then the mother of John and James comes to plead for special privileges of power, authority and glory for her two sons. This mother has accepted the requirement that the way to the kingdom is through the cross, at least for the Son of Man, the Messiah. She believes that the Lord Jesus will rise from the dead to rule over Israel.

She and her sons are prepared to pay the price - that of drinking the Messiah’s cup of suffering with him. She and they accept the Messiah as crucified and risen Lord.

One of the sons, John, is the beloved disciple, a special favourite of our Lord’s. But their mother was being fair to both sons : both should have positions of special privilege, honour and power. She does not want to

show any favouritism to one of her sons, as Jesus did. More or less legitimate, isn't it? At least fairly reasonable.

But the reaction of the ten other apostles also seems eminently reasonable."We all know that John is a special favourite of the Master. We wouldn't quite be up to questioning the Master about it. Maybe he wants to groom John to be his successor ! Who knows?

"Anyway, they had no business dragging their mother into it; and asking for two special positions - that is too much. We too have worked hard, faced much, suffered opposition, left our family and friends to follow the Master. Haven't we?"

It is in this ambiance of power-seeking, ambition and jealousy in which all the Twelve were caught up that Jesus drops the bomb: "The Son of Man came to serve, not be served."

We need to look at the leadership of the churches and the ecumenical movement to see whether we are really much better than the apostles.

"We are all Christians," we say, "committed and all that. We could all have made better careers if we had gone into secular jobs and vocations. We have made considerable sacrifice to come and serve the church or the ecumenical movement. We are not struggling for power, mind you. All we are asking for is a little recognition."

Nothing has been so divisive of the churches as the ambitions, the jealousies, the power struggles among Christian workers and leaders. Quite unconsciously, we fall prey to that perennial temptation of humanity in the world, the desire for power and position, for worldly glory and honour.

And so long as that is our basic orientation, there can be neither true unity nor genuine community. Humble diakonia is in fact a central principle of the unity of the church.

Matthew 27:55 tells us that the mother of the sons of Zebedee was one of the people who used their own money to serve Jesus. She was thus already engaged in diakonia when she asked Jesus for the special favour of positions of power and glory. Is that temptation not with us still - that in our very serving we seek power and position?

The missionaries of a previous generation were in that situation. They served the people of the mission field sincerely; and in so far as they did that, they had a social position, power and prestige which they would not

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have when they came back to their own people. The new missionaries of the interchurch aid empire are in a worse situation. Some are stationed among the people whom they serve, but most are but periodic visitors.

And they are welcomed warmly and specially by the people who locally handle their handouts. In return for their diakonia, they get to sit on the right hand and on the left hand of the powers-that-be. There is something radically wrong with that sort of diakonia.

There are four necessary conditions of an authentic Christian diakonia:

- willingness to suffer with those whom one serves and to give of oneself;
- humility as opposed to condescension towards those to be served;
- not using diakonia as an occasion for domination, privilege and rank
- willingness to identify with the served to the point of laying down one's life for their sake.

1. Authentic diakonia involves more than giving money, goods or services, more than “sharing” resources and personnel. It demands taking on oneself the suffering of others. The server must lay aside a sense of self-sufficiency, in order to feel and take on the sense of helplessness and need experienced by the served.

The foreign missionaries of an earlier generation were better placed in this regard than the new inter-church aid and donor agency missionaries. The latter do not live among the people they serve. Only from a distance do they feel the pinch of the need of the poor.

Those who handle “projects” and “programmes” are usually much better paid than routine church workers. They serve out of their abundance and live lives far removed from that of the poor whom they are to serve.

We need a diakonic structure based in the people of the local church. Only then will the church in the locality be able to exercise its diakonic function, largely financed from the resources of the local church people, and largely involving the local Christians themselves suffering with and serving the poor.

2. Attitudes are all-important in authentic diakonia. The server must respect the served. If those who are served are made to feel inferior and dependent, such service cannot be regarded as Christian; for instead of mediating Christ's healing love, it simply generates resentment and wounded pride. Christian service has no right to anticipate either gratitude or ties of

obligation and dependence.

3. Inter-church aid may not quite do what international aid does: use aid to capture markets and exploit people so that much more flows back to the aid-giving economy through unjust trade relations.

But inter-church aid is used in much the same way as international aid to create “spheres of influence” and areas of economic, political and cultural domination and dependence. This is particularly true of bilateral inter-church aid, but ecumenical aid, insofar as it represents aid from a sector of the Western consortium which dominates and exploits Two-Thirds World economies, is not much different.

4. Willingness to lay down one’s life for the sake of those served seems to be an acid test of authentic Christian diakonia. This seems an extremely remote possibility in the context of international inter-church diakonia. It makes much more sense in the context of the service of a local church to the people around or the people of that nation.

Diakonia involves the element of confronting the oppressors of the people whom one wants to serve. This can hardly be done by international inter-church aid, but can be done more effectively by the churches in a locality mutually supporting and reinforcing each other in the struggle against injustice.

At this point, indeed, outside aid may be counter-productive.

If Christ our Lord is the model for authentic diakonia, then a diakonia which involves no cost to oneself, beyond “sharing money or personnel”, can hardly be authentic.

37

Meditation on The Beatitudes

Scripture: Matthew 5:1-12.

1 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him.

2 And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

5 “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

10 “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 “Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

12 “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

- Revised Standard Version and Catholic edition, RSV

Have you ever asked yourself

Aren't the Beatitudes somewhat impractical? May be even impossible to carry out?

But can we really, as Christians, afford to ignore them?

Then consider that

In the process of Christian reflection over the last few centuries the Sermon on the Mount has been practically ignored. People say it is too impractical for us to live by.

There have been various ways of justifying this. One of the most effective was proposed by no less a person than Albert Schweitzer whose statement was that the Sermon on the Mount was valid only because Christ was expecting the Kingdom to come soon; it is an ethic for just the interim.

Another theory advanced by a large group of people in the West is that the Sermon on the Mount doesn't belong to this world at all. Only when the Kingdom comes, are people to live according to its precepts. Until then we live by something else. I once said to some people holding this view: "The Sermon on the Mount says if someone hits you on the left cheek, let him hit you on the right cheek, too. Will people be hitting each other in the Kingdom? The Sermon talks about persecution. Is there to be persecution in the Kingdom of God when it comes?"

Indeed, the Sermon on the Mount is not meant for some future age but for the age in which we live where people hit and hurt each other, where the righteous are persecuted, where there is oppression, where there is injustice in all forms. If we ignore it, we ignore it at our peril.

The form of the Sermon on the Mount is one very familiar to the Jews of the first century. It is the usual way in which a rabbi taught in those days. Now the rabbi teaches in the synagogue. But quite often in Palestine, especially long before the synagogues came into being, the rabbi, if he was a good one, was a poor man who had only his Book with him. He would go with his bag on his shoulder, walking from village to village, and when he wanted to teach the people, he would look for the largest fig tree in the center of the village. The fig tree has large leaves and gives lots of shade.

The rabbi would sit down under the fig tree and take his scroll of the Law of Moses and open it and read. He didn't have a microphone or trumpet or poster to announce him. He would just sit patiently, quietly studying his people. They would slowly gather around him, just sitting, waiting for him to open his mouth. When the rabbi thought he was ready and the people around him were ready, he would open his mouth and teach.

The phrase "to open his mouth" is a technical term in Jewish literature. It means to start to teach. The rabbi would first give a sentence - usually a poetical sentence - which the people were to memorize. It was easy for them to memorize. Their minds could absorb things easily. I know of an illiterate tribe in Ethiopia. The missionaries left when the Italians came into the country. When they came back the people still knew their Bible. If given the first few words, they could recite the rest of the verse and chapter. So, the

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rabbi gave one or two or three sentences and the people memorized them. The rest of what he had to say was a commentary on the summary given at the beginning - as a peg on which to put the thoughts that would follow. If you look at the Jewish service book today you will find a list of summaries of the law as given by various rabbis.

The Sermon on the Mount - The Beatitudes - are the summary of the law as our Lord taught it. It is the summary of everything he had to teach. It is the teaching of Christ in a nutshell. Once you understand this, you have an understanding of what Jesus came to teach.

38

To Go or Not to Go

Scripture: Numbers 13:17-33

If you read also just before and after the passage cited, you will find that it was God's command that they should go and spy out the land. But when they heard about the giants, the people raised a long cry and wept. They could still not trust the God of the Exodus. They wanted to go back to Egypt.

The way forward in spiritual life is like mountain-climbing. There are times when the going is so rough. No place to rest. One feels the whole thing should not have been started in the first place. But not easy to go back either. Yes there are clusters of grapes ahead big enough to be carried by two men on a pole. But there are also giants who threaten our very life.

The moments of great challenge are also moments of strong temptation. This is so in personal life and in national life. Man cannot grow without taking risks. If the going were always smooth, we would always be on the go. But when it gets rough, we are tempted to take the easy way out – to go back. But that way lies spiritual suicide. (Numbers 14:37).

Man is not meant to be daunted by giants. "They are stronger than we". But that judgment was based on physical size and numbers. With God, no giant can stop us. If we move in obedience to His command, the giants will not necessarily move out of our way. We will have to tackle them. We have to face the possibility of death. But ultimately, "we shall overcome". For, He has overcome death itself. He is with us, alive.

39

A New Leader

Scripture: Numbers 27:12-23

Moses was a great man. When he was told, “your feet shall not touch the promised land” he did not whine about his own fate. He was concerned about the people, that they should not be left as sheep without a shepherd. To be concerned about others rather than about oneself is a sure mark of greatness.

But even great men are tempted and they fall. In a moment of extreme tension Moses lost his temper. The people of Israel had rebelled against Moses, for they had no water (Numbers 20). The land was dry - no fruits. They told Moses he had made a mistakes in bringing them into that wilderness. In fact they said the whole Exodus was a mistake.

People lose their sense of proportion when their very existence is at stake. That is normal. We find it in the emotional actions of segregationists. But Moses was not justified in losing his temper. God had told him to **speak** to the rock. (Numbers 20:8). But he showed himself off as well as his temper by **hitting** the rock angrily with the rod. There he failed to give glory to God.

And so the great man’s leadership was not to reach the point of triumph. He was concerned about others; but he took the glory of God too lightly. So he was not to enter Canaan.

But because he accepted his punishment graciously, God gave the people a new leader, Joshua. He was to be trained in responsibility even while Moses was alive. (Numbers 27:20).

Our personal fate is not so important as that of the people. God save mankind, even if I have to perish!

40

Time of Decision

Scripture: Deut. 30:15-20

God has placed us in a world of life and death, of blessing and curse. We have to choose a blessed life or a cursed death. Life is not automatic. Each man is asked to decide. That is what the heart is for.

Then heart, in the Old Testament, is not the seat of emotions but the center of personality. With the heart we choose the direction of our existence – towards death or towards life. Death is not final, unless you choose to make it so. Life can triumph over death. But how?

“Loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice, and cleaving to him; for that means life”. There is no other way. He has loved us. He always loves us. That is why we can love him. To love God is to surrender ourselves to his love.

But simply “giving my heart to God” will not do. There has to be a choice of the heart, of the will, of the centre of my personality. I have to realize that he loves me more than I love myself. He will look after me. He will not forsake me. I choose to find my security in Him, not in my own ability nor in my possessions and power. I am His. So I shall not waver or be anxious about my future. He is in charge.

But life means also heeding His voice. This voice is heard not only in my conscience. He speaks in the scriptures. He speaks in the events of our time. He speaks in the words of my neighbour. The heart must both discern and obey. It must cleave to Him, always.

41

The Stronghold Falls

Scripture: Josh. 6:1-21

The ruins of fallen Jericho are still there for our eyes to see. Modern archaeology has transformed this story from a fable to an account based on a historical event.

Walled cities still confront us in our society. Vested interests build themselves into assumed safety behind stone walls. Evil and corruption, exploitation and injustice, dishonesty and degradation seem to be deeply entrenched in our nation as in other nations. Even in our Churches, vested interests have built strong fortresses.

How simple it would have been if we had only to encircle these stronghold and blow our trumpets in order to see them collapse ! Ofcourse it is not so simple.

But then words do have a power, when used by the power of God. To be afraid to speak out against entrenched evil is exactly what evil wants. "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing". said Edmund Burke. Evil triumphs when the trumpets of the church are silent. When Christians spot evil in power and speak out in humility but with deep conviction, the strongholds of evil may not directly crumble; it may even be that the trumpet itself is muffled and the prophet persecuted. But the word of God spoken in power spells doom to all entrenched evil. Only we must not be afraid; we must believe; we must watch the times; we must spot the stronghold; and we must speak the word in time: the rest is God's work.

42

Judges and Judgment

Scripture: Judges 2:16-23

Would it not have been wonderful if God had driven out all our enemies and left us to live in peace? Would we not have thanked Him for His goodness to us and lived our good lives without fear?

Human history tells us: “not necessarily”. In times of peace and affluence men forsake God and go awhoring after other God’s of their own making: often made of silver and gold, or power and sensuality.

The toughness of the people of Israel, out of whom Jesus Christ came, was built up through centuries of struggle against marauding enemies. Yet they were called to be the Harbingers of peace to the nations.

Christian nations, especially in the West, have been toughened by centuries of fighting – mostly very unchristian fighting. Is it not about time they become real messengers of peace, trying to divert all the means of technology at their disposal for the building up of a world-wide human community? Would that not be the means of bringing glory to the name of God? Is not the name of God blasphemed in the world because “Christian” nations have been fighting each other for so long?

Are we still in that stage of immaturity of early Israel when only continuous attacks from enemies could keep her even nominally willing to seek God? Are we mature enough for peace? Then God may grant us peace. But perhaps not until we have learnt to look at the whole of humanity, Christian or non-Christian, Muslim or Communist, Hindu or Buddhist, with Christ’s compassion!

43

Gideon's Hundred

Scripture: Judges 7:19-25

There is something in the story of Gideon that appeals to children. Children are so impressed by power, especially when power over the mighty is exercised by the small and the weak.

But in a sense we are all children, weak and small, all but overwhelmed by problems beyond our coping. And in our weaker moments we too dream of magical and impressive power.

The point of the story of Gideon is not simply a question of magical power. God wants man to grow by daring to do the impossible good. He must not shrink back from driving away evil and creating the good, just because evil is much too powerful and beyond our coping. Even when the power of evil is alarmingly impressive and our own appears weak and ineffective in comparison, we are asked to dare. Faith is always a question of daring. Daring for two reasons: first, faith knows God is at work, that Christ has already overcome evil, and that the principalities and powers are already beaten, though not mopped up; second, because faith delivers us from anxiety about our own fate. We are in Christ. Our life is secure with Him. Death itself cannot touch that life.

By faith Gideon.... By faith we can dare do the good that seems so impossible, because it is God who is at work. But not my own good; God is there when man strives for the good of all men. It is for this that Christ died. It is for this that he continues to make intercession.

44

Samson and Delilah

Scripture: Judges 16:13-21

Samson's strength did not belong to him. It was given to him for the defence of Israel. But he became irresponsible in using it and careless about guarding it.

Whatever strength we have, whether wealth, power or position, is also a trust from God to be carefully guarded and responsibly used. It is not ours to enjoy as we please, for our own delight and entertainment. Samson's physical prowess was the reason for his easy access Delilah.

Delilah, on the other hand, was extracting information from Samson, not for the benefit of the nation or for the sake of others, but because the Philistine lords had promised her eleven hundred silver pieces each, if she could find the secret of his strength. Neither Samson nor Delilah are models for us to emulate. The one misused his strength to do wrong, and the other did wrong to get rich and powerful.

This has something to say to us about the temptations of the rich and the poor -whether they be nations, races or individuals. The wealthy and the mighty find it difficult to use their wealth and power as a trust in the service of others. The poor and the weak are tempted by the desire for wealth and power to resort to a way of life without integrity.

If only Samson and Delilah could have been roused from their dallying to recognize that neither money nor pleasure was the most important thing in life, and that they had to work together in order that all may live to the glory of God!

45

A Woman's Petition

Scripture: 1 Sam. 1:12-20

Not to have a son was an occasion for social reproach in Israel. Hannah did not want a son merely to ensure the continuance of her husband's family. Elkanah's other wife Paninnah had children. That made Hannah's lack only so much more acute.

But Hannah's reproach became the occasion for the rise of a great prophet in Israel. If Hannah had a child in the normal course of things, that child may have grown up to become a very ordinary person. In her sorrow she learnt to draw close to God, and in that struggle between hope and despair she was enabled to promise her child for God's special service. When her prayer was heard and Samuel was born, she dedicated him to the service of God in the temple. The child grew up to fulfil the mother's fondest hopes.

Two things to note – Hanna's prayer was for something for herself, but that something or someone was to be dedicated to God. We need also to learn to pray fervently for things which we can totally and unreservedly dedicate to God.

Equally important is the fact that our temporary affliction can draw us closer to God; at the same time, if we continue in prayer in the midst of our affliction, the answer to that prayer can really change the course of history, and accomplish great things for God.

With genuine and authentic prayer, both want and pain can be used for the glory of God.

46

Hannah's Gift

Scripture: 1 Sam. 1:21-28

Hannah brought her child up till he was three years old. She showered all her affection and care on him, knowing well that she would soon have to part with him.

But she brought up her child for the Lord, not for herself. He would not bring her protection in her old age, or wealth in his success.

What great things a mother's love can accomplish for a child, when mother and child are both dedicated to God! Hannah prayed fervently for a child. Samuel was the child of prayer. He was brought up by a praying mother. At three he was dedicated to God in a sacrificial act of prayer. From that time on he grew up in the house of prayer, the temple of the Lord. Samuel's greatness in the history of our salvation was due to prayer - prayer from his mother, prayer from Eli the priest, and prayer from Samuel himself.

When our children can also be devoted to God with the same fervency in prayer, what great things God can do through such a dedicated child!

It is the failure of prayer that creates the spreading blanket of gloom that envelops our civilization. And prayer is usually learned at home – from one's mother. But Samuel's mother, like her father in heaven, gave her only begotten son that the world may have life. Her prayer was real, because it was willing to pay the price. Prayer that does not also give, but only asks, can never be real prayer.

The Lord Speaks

Scripture: 1 Sam. 3:1-4

The times of Samuel's childhood were very much like our own. "The word of the Lord was rare in these days; there was no frequent vision". These are times when God is either ignored or taken for granted. When things go reasonably well, and there is no major catastrophe, people become self-sufficient in their thinking, and the word of the Lord becomes rare. Mankind has no vision and is in danger of perishing from boredom and lack of purpose.

In such time, there are a few sensitive souls, childlike in their response to God, like Samuel, who are privileged to hear the Lord speak his word. Samuel was pure and innocent, sleeping peacefully in the holy of holies (v. 3) and the lamp of the Lord had not yet gone out there. How rare are such souls to our day, innocent and holy, responsive to God in a simple childlike faith, sleeping peacefully under the lamp of the Lord!

Of course Samuel needed the guidance of Eli the priest to recognize the voice of the Lord and to respond to it. This priest did not know how to bring up his own children, who were the cause of God's wrath falling upon his household (v. 13ff). But Samuel learned from him to say to God: "Speak, for Thy servant hears".

We need the Church, despite all its faults and blasphemies to teach us how to say "Our Father" and to hear when He speaks.

But we need Samuels also who are able to listen to the word of the Lord, and to live out that word in humble obedience.

48

The First King

Scripture: 1 Sam. 9:15-10:1

Saul, the first king of Israel, came from the tribe of Benjamin, the least of the twelve tribes of Israel, and from a very humble family (v. 21). God seems to delight in exalting the lowly and bringing down the haughty. It is the man who is least ambitious for himself that gets chosen of God for great tasks.

Saul came to Samuel to get help to find again his lost donkeys; instead he found a kingdom. God's ways are past our finding out and beyond our fondest expectations.

But Saul was not totally without natural endowments. He was tall and handsome, standing head and shoulders above his peers (9:2). It was, however, the cry of the people of Israel in their affliction, that led to his being chosen king (9:16). If only the nations of our world together cry out to God, the men for our time will be called forward by God to lead all the peoples of the world into His kingdom. But how few nations there are today, which can cry out in unison to God. When will the day come, when Christ's Church, gathering together the voices of all the nations among whom she is dispersed, can cry out with one voice for the salvation of mankind!

We need salvation from our enemies – guilt, anxiety, boredom, injustice, hatred, war, cruelty and the rest. But in order to be rescued from this, mankind must cry out together with the voice of one Church, that God may raise us up leaders of His choice in all nations.

49

On Choosing the Good Portion

Scripture:

“Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; few things or only one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:41).

Poor Martha! Was not the Lord somewhat unfair to her? If she had also sat down “at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching” like her sister Mary, who would have cooked and washed and served? Could both Martha and Mary have afforded to sit at Jesus’ feet permanently? Was it not an excellent division of labour that Mary could sit and meditate, while Martha cooked and served? Of course Mary could share with Martha later on all the spiritual riches she had gathered from the Master.

There are some today who would argue for such a division of labour between the West and the East. The West is good at material culture, at science and technology, while the East is more “spiritual”, they say. In the Church too, they suggest, let the East emphasize worship while in the West we would concentrate on active service. We need to produce in order that West and East alike may eat. The East also needs to work, of course, but they seem to have a natural flair for spiritual matters.

It is seldom that the theologians hold such a view. But one encounters many in the West who sincerely believe this, and look, not so much to the Christian East, but to the Eastern religious tradition as a whole, especially the great religions of Buddhism and Hinduism, to help the West to recover its inner equilibrium which it seems to have lost in recent times. And when some Westerners adopt some Eastern techniques of acquiring inner tranquility like yoga or mystic contemplation, the theologians shout “syncretism”!

Of course the Biblical passage has nothing to do with the East and West situation. What it does deal with are two personalities. They have often been exegeted as representing two “types” in the Church, the “active” and the “contemplative”. And according to many interpreters, Jesus discourages the “active” and says quite plainly that the “contemplative” has “chosen the good portion”.

Exegetically, there is little ground for this interpretation. The contrast in our Lord's words is certainly not between activism and contemplation, but rather between "many" and "one" or much and few. But even this contrast is not to be taken in a purely quantitative sense, as if to say riches are superfluous, poverty is to be preferred.

The crucial issue is the **distraction** caused by the many. One is reminded of Kierkegaard's famous essay: "Purity of heart is to will one thing". Martha's trouble was not that she worked to serve, but that she was "distracted with much serving" (Luke 10:39b). Distracted by variety. Weighed down by too many concerns.

She herself was keyed up to a high pitch of serving. Neither could she bear to see anyone else not serving. Mary was sitting and listening to the Master. And distracted Martha distracts both the Lord and Mary by complaining to him:

"Master, don't you care that my sister has left me alone to serve? Ask her to get up and help me." (10:40)

There we see the current problem between Christian East and West. The Eastern Church continues to place emphasis on poverty and quiet living with the Lord in worship and meditation. The Western Church also once did this. But today she is in a different mood. She has seen the phenomenal results of human work. Her conscience is aroused at the poverty and suffering of the world, particularly since she has begun to be able to deal with poverty and pain in her own sphere. She knows that if only the world would follow her pattern and work hard, so much needless suffering and poverty can be removed.

It is inevitable therefore that the West should complain to the Lord: "Master, do you not see how hard I work, while my sister East sits idle. Ask her to get up and work with me."

How an Easterner wishes that the Mary and Martha picture entirely fits the East-West situation! Would to God that the Eastern Church had chosen the good portion and sat at the Master's feet! As a matter of fact, she is just as much distracted with many things, though not, also, with much serving.

And therefore, this word of Scripture hits us, both East and West, with equal force. We are all distracted, the Western Church with much serving, the Eastern Church with lesser concerns. No Easterner with honesty can stand on a pedestal today to condemn the Western Church for her activism.

On Choosing the Good Portion

Laziness was not the better portion which Mary chose. And the Eastern Church is decidedly lazy today. She is no Mary, sitting undistracted at the Master's feet. She is not even as noble as Martha, who was after all, distracted by a good thing, namely much serving.

And yet, it remains true that the Western Church is distracted with much serving. "Encumbered" (*perispao*) is the word which the Scripture uses. The serving is by no means to be disparaged. *Diakonia* can never be disregarded by the Church. This is almost the only place where the Scriptures would appear to speak disparagingly of diakonia - with the exception of Acts 6:2, where the Twelve ask the Church to relieve them from the duty of "*diakonein trapezeis*" (serving tables), so that they can devote full time to "Prayer and the service of the word" (*proseuche kai he diakonia tou logou*). (Acts 6:4) Here we see clearly a distinction between two kinds of service: direct service to the physical needs of men, and the service of prayer and teaching. The first service or ministry belongs to the Church as much as the second. The Twelve ask the Church to choose from among themselves "seven men of good testimony filled with the Spirit and with wisdom" to await tables. (Acts 6:3). And it is one of these, Stephen, who was a great preacher and wonder-worker (Acts 6:8). Another, Philip, witnessed to the Ethiopian Eunuch and baptized him. The two ministries in the Church, the ministry of the Seven, and the ministry of the Twelve, in both of which all Christians have a share, are complementary to each other.

Is it a legitimate question today to ask whether the Western Church is in danger of emphasizing the one at the expense of the other? It is no use answering that the East may be neglecting both ministries. That may very well be true. And a sermon preached to the East may need to put the emphasis on both ministries.

For one who has known and worked with many in the West in both types of ministries, the impression gains strength that the Western Church finds it increasingly easier to devote herself to the ministry of the seven than to that of the twelve. What is worse, the very intensity of devotion to this ministry of service and its heavy responsibility seems to weigh down on the spirit of many whom one encounters in work camps, service projects and administrative offices in the Church.

Perhaps this division of labour which the Twelve proposed to the Church was artificial. No man can serve tables without devoting himself equally to the ministry of prayer. The experience of the Apostolic Church demonstrates this. Stephen was "full of grace and power", not a simple activist. He laid down his life, not in serving tables, but in ministering the word. Philip went

down to the Samaritans “and proclaimed to them the Christ” (Acts 8:3,12). After baptizing the Eunuch, “the Spirit of the Lord caught up Philip”. (Acts 8:39).

Martha’s trouble was not that she served much. No, she was “anxious and troubled concerning too many things” (Luke 10:41). The word “troubled” (*thorubazei*) omitted by some of the ancient texts, is eloquent. It is used to describe the wailing of the mourning crowd around the ruler’s daughter supposed to be dead (Mat. 9:23, see also Mark 5:39, Acts 17:5, Acts 20:10 etc.). There was an element of panic in Martha’s complaint about her heavy responsibility. She was afraid she would fail in the many things which she had to do to please the Master, and asked for her sister’s help.

This anxious responsibility seems to be the key to the problem of activism. Some think in terms like if Christians don’t do something about racial justice the Church would be left behind; if economic problems are not tackled by the Church communism will spread; if Christians do not enter into politics, the nation and the world will go to dogs. This is Martha, anxious, on the verge of despair, encumbered with a tremendous weight of “responsibility”. And perhaps an Easterner is not being entirely unfair in seeing something of this Martha in much of what the Western Church says and does. Activism seems to spring from a strange blend of desperate pessimism and naive optimism. On the one hand, one is afraid that if we don’t set matters right, things will go completely wrong. On the other, one too easily assumed that if we set our minds and hands to it we can create the just society. Are not both these in effect the expression of basic unbelief?

Mary knew that there were many things to be done in the house if the needs of the Master were to be fully and elaborately met. But she knew also that with the Master one was safe; that there was no need for anxiety. Yes, he needed food, and so did they. But it would not have mattered much if the food was skimpy and not too elaborately prepared. She could sit at his feet, and then return to the kitchen to do a simple cooking job. She had a sense of proportion which Martha lacked. She knew what came first, what was more important. Mary did not despise serving tables, but neither was she consumed with anxiety about it.

Yes, there is population explosion; there is disease, poverty, and war; there is racial discrimination, social, political and economic injustice; there is man’s inhumanity to man; there is laziness and crime; and Christians ought to be concerned about these problems and act to remedy these.

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Yet, by becoming over-anxious about these, we loose our own inner self, which is established and grows only in quiet faith and a life of prayer.

We can no longer retreat, it is clear, into either of the simple alternatives of quietism or activism. And when the Western Church is accused of activism, the suggestion is not that it should return to quietism.

Much serving can be destructively distracting. Destructively, because one loses one's hold of ultimate reality, one's own deepest core, and becomes lost in the many concerns of action and responsibility.

Serving is a Christian task, but the Christian does not find his fulfillment in serving. Without a deep "inner lift" of prayer and worship, study and action can become self-defeating as well as distracting. Study and action can become an obsession or an escape from facing the emptiness of the inner self.

Much service itself can be a disguised version of modern man's insatiable thirst for variety, for new experience, for doing things which are different from one's normal actions, of the frustratingly ineffective attempt to forget through distraction.

The activism of service one cannot disparage. But actions in order to be Christian and creative, have to come from the being of man rooted and established in Christ. Doing changes being, it is true. But doing alone cannot create being. Our Christian action, unless it springs from deeper levels of Christian being, cannot manifest the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world.

The recovery of this Christian being alone can quicken the mission of the Church. Activism cannot be mission. Without activity there can be no complete mission. But the source springs of that activity have to be in a life of prayer and worship.

One thing is needful; and that is to know the Lord, to worship Him and serve Him. To serve one's fellowman becomes natural, only when the service of God in peace, depth and joy, becomes real. Mary had chosen that good portion. Martha was distracted with much serving.

What Good Shall I Do?

Scripture:

“Teacher, What good shall I do, so that I can get eternal life?” (Matthew 19:16).

That was the rich young man’s question to Jesus. I want to say three things about this passage.

I

As usual Jesus did not answer the question directly at first. He turned the question around. He said, in effect, “You have already assumed that it is by doing good that you get eternal life. All you want to know from me is, what particular form of the good. The Good is One. “Can you grasp that?” Obviously, that was too deep for the young man. The statement of Jesus has, as usual, so many layers of meaning. Even our Bible translators including ancient versions usually manage to grasp only one layer of that meaning. They all say, in agreement with Mark 10:18, that God alone is good.

The Greek original in Mathew simply says: One is the Good. *eis estin ho agathos*. Of course both One and the Good are masculine, not neuter. But that is not the point. Jesus is saying to the young man that his problem is that he wants to be selective in doing some forms of the good and not others. When Jesus tests him on the commandments, he says he is keeping them all from childhood. But when Jesus says he should sell his property, give the money to the poor and follow Jesus, he says, no, not that form of the good, for in that instance I judge my property to be good. Jesus says that you cannot be selective in choosing the good in some cases and going on practicing the opposite of the good in other cases. The Good is one and demands total commitment.

II

The second thing I wanted to say is this. If the young man had actually followed Jesus, he would soon have realised that getting eternal life is by far not the most important thing. Preoccupation about one’s own salvation can lead to an extreme form of spiritual selfishness and lovelessness that drives out God from our lives. Eternal life is of course important for us

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mortals who know only the kind of life over which death rules. But we cannot get eternal life or salvation or freedom from death and evil, by doing a lot of good or by working for it. It is always a gift from God. We accept that precious gift of grace with simple and everlasting gratitude, and with great humility, knowing that none of us ever deserves it.

III

If salvation is not the most important thing, then what is? That is my third point. Jesus would have said to the rich young man, if he were ready to hear the word: Love the Good, cling to the Good, let the Good hold you safe; let the Good dwell in you and change you; let all that you do be done by the Good that indwells you. For the Good is God, God is good, God alone is good, all other good comes from God. And One is the Good. If you follow Jesus you would know that. If you know Jesus, you would know that Jesus is good and the manifestation of the Good. God and Jesus are one. You and I too can be One in that One Good. And the whole universe, the whole created order, must also be in that One Good. That is what is important, not my salvation.

Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. Amen.

51

Call to Holy Living

Scripture:

“That though judged in the flesh like men, they might live in the Spirit like God” (1 Pet. 4 : 6b).

1. In the epistles of the New Testament, one finds no explicit call to the Church to engage in Mission. The Apostolic exhortations are all invariably in terms of conduct or way of life (*Peripatein*, often translated walk, is used about 30 times in Pauline epistles, 10 times in the Johannine letters). This way of life is an integral part of the mission of the Church.

In the Gospels too, the call of Jesus was to repentance in an ethical context, and to a way of life. His call to man was not simply to become proclaimers of the Gospel.

In the Epistle of James the emphasis is clearly on the way of life rather than on confession of faith.

The “Christian Way” is one of the ways in which God is revealed, as He was revealed in the Person and Life of Christ.

2. Though the importance of holy living has always been recognized in the history of the Church, the patterns of holiness have differed from time to time. Our times call for relevant forms of this way of holiness.

3. In the earliest period, when society as a whole, with but few exceptions, was corrupt and corrupting, and the Church was a social organism that had yet to shape its own patterns of life, the emphasis had to fall on separation from the world. “Do not be mised with unbelievers”, says Saint Paul, (2 Cor. 6:14) and goes on to quote the Old Testament.

“Come out from among them,
and be ye separate from them, saith the Lord
and touch nothing unclean, then I will welcome you...”

This idea of Separation (*aphorismos*) had both a negative and a positive side, but in the New Testament *aphoridzein* has always a positive sense. That from which one is separated has very little importance as compared with that for which one is set apart. (Mt. 13:49, 25:32, Lk. 6:22, Acts 13:2,

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19:9, Rom. 1:1, 2 Cor. 6:17, Gal. 1:15, 2:12). In our time we have to rediscover the meaning of *aphorismos*, for separation in the social sense can lead to little more than the ghetto mentality and a holier-than-thou self-righteousness. But *aphorismas* as being set apart for something is still relevant.

4. **Sanctification** was also a key idea in the early Church. The relation of identity between sanctification and Holy Living (*hagiasmos* and *hagiosune*) is often obscured by the assumption that it is God who sanctifies but we who have to live the holy life. This, however, is a mis-reading of the New Testament. Both sanctification and Holy Living are divine actions in which men have to take a free and active part. The New Testament, following the Old, speaks of sanctification or holiness as derived from three factors: (a) being set apart exclusively for the use of God, (b) remaining in proximity to God or other realities which bear the presence of God (Mt. 23:17,19), and (c) ethical quality (Mk 6:20; Eph. 1:4). The three concepts are reflected in the three words of our title “Call to Holy Living”.

5. **The Call.** To equate the call to holiness with ethics is to short-circuit the full course of God’s call. If the call were only to social justice, then men could obey the call without necessarily becoming Christians. The call the *klesis*, the *vocatio*, has to be personally heeded as a call in Christ, and the ethics is a response in the Holy Spirit to the call (Eph. 4:1). The call is not simply to righteousness, but more centrally to a hope (Eph. 4:4). Thus the call is first a promise and the ethics is the consequence of taking God’s promise seriously (2 Thess. 1:11), but the saving word is the promise, not the ethics (2 Tim. 1:9). The call is the ground of holiness (Rom. 1:7).

6. **Holy.** The root-meaning of the Hebrew word *Qodesh* appears to be apartness or separation - separation from the common, the defective, the defiled and in this sense, unique, perfect and pure. God is holy in His own right, and hence the incessant angelic hymn: Holy, Holy, Holy addressed to God. Places, persons, times and things become holy not by virtue of their uniqueness, perfection or purity, but by being set apart for God or association with Him (e.g. Deut. 26:15; Ex. 3:5; 2 Chron. 8:11b; Num. 4:19; Ex. 16:23, 2 Chron. 31:18, etc.) The holiness of Israel or the Church does not have its ground in its way of life, but in its association with God, as set apart for Himself. But this holiness is to be maintained by proximity to God and worked out in terms of holy living. This association with God, which the New Testament calls “Access with confidence” (Eph. 3:12) or “access in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph. 2:18) is expressed in worship and prayer.

7. **Living.** As stated, the way of life is an expression of holiness, not its ground. It is the fruit of God's call, and the human response of worship. In Old Testament thought, to be saved means first to be able to live. Life is the consequence of salvation by the call to Hope and Holy Living, and is expressed in walking (*peripatesis*). In classical Greek *Peripatesis* refers only to physical walking, without any ethical connotation. But in the Septuagint this word translates *halachah*, which literally means walking, but in dozens of O.T. passages like Ps. 101:6 or 2 Kings 21:21 comes to have a definitely ethical sense, good or bad.

8. The call to Holy Living, which comes through the Gospel of Jesus Christ can be fulfilled only by keeping the two things together: (a) keeping a proximate relationship to God, and (b) walking in His ways.

9. Holy Living cannot, however, be equated with praying and doing. Ultimately it refers to a quality of being which has no standard less than the Person of God Himself. Thus holiness cannot be a static state of perfection we can attain in this world or the next, but like God's own dynamic being, something into which and in which we must also live and grow.

10. A denial of the possibility of attaining perfection in this world should not nevertheless lead us to the simple position of the unavoidability of sin and therefore of the superfluosity of ethical holiness.

11. It is equally dangerous to conceive holiness in terms of individual perfection alone. "Putting on the new man" is not something which each individual does, but a corporate holiness that belongs to "the holy and beloved" community, in which the holiness of each derives from and contributes to the holiness of the whole.

12. Neither should we ever think of holiness apart from the Spirit of Holiness, the Person of the Holy Spirit, and the gifts or the charismata that He distributes in the Body of Christ (Romans 12:4ff, I Cor. 12:4ff, Eph. 4:4ff.).

13. This Holiness is always a world-related holiness, since the Spirit of God always manifests Himself through the created order. It is expressed in suffering and joy, and loving service always issues forth from it. Holiness, righteousness and love are inseparable from each other.

14. A new pattern of corporate and personal holiness, relevant to our time and countries, constitutes the call of the Gospel to the Church today. The invariable elements of this holiness are, corporate and personal worship and prayer on the one hand, and social and personal ethics on the other. Both are from faith, looking forward to hope, and in love.

Jesus Christ: The Life of the World

Biblical Meditations on the Theme of Life

Life is a strange phenomenon. It is half of the paradox of our world. Here on our earth life and death coexist, just as good and evil coexist.

The second law of Thermodynamics applies to the whole world, as we know it, but not necessarily to life. In the non-organic world, says the second law of Thermodynamics, every thing is in a process of dissolution from a more complex level of organisation to a less complex one. In life however, things move from the less complex to the more complex and more asymmetric. This is the paradox.

But Science finds it difficult to draw a clear line between life and non-life. They seem to belong to a single bundle with an enormous degree of variation - from the simple Hydrogen atom to the enormously complex organisation of matter called the human brain.

Life as we know it could not have existed always. It began at some point in the history of evolution, when the right kind of carbon compounds developed the right kind of stable structures with the right kind of power to absorb materials from outside and incorporate them within the structures, without the structures themselves not being destroyed in the process. We are not yet able to reproduce life in the laboratory. But there is no reason why this may not soon become possible.

People who believe that life in our world happened by accident (e.g. Jacques Monod) have no basis in science for their belief. Human beings have already developed space crafts which can travel to the moon and other planets. They could also synthesise life in the laboratory some time in the near future. But this would not mean that life in our universe began by accident, any more than it would prove that a space craft came into existence by accident. It is infinitely more difficult and complicated to build a single protein molecule of the right kind of symmetry, stability and inner dynamics than to construct a space craft or other sophisticated machinery.

So Christians who believe that life in our universe has its origin in design are certainly on more solid scientific ground than those who regard it as an accident. But Christians do not ground their faith that life was created by

God on any scientific argument. As the writer of Hebrews clearly states :

“By faith we know that the ages (worlds – *aionae*) were established by God’s word, so that the visible came out of the unmanifest” (Heb. 11:2)

But that applies not only to life, but also to non-life or to inorganic matter. It is for this reason that the Fathers of the Church insist on the following three things :

- a. Matter and life are of one piece
- b. Both parts of the one piece came from God
- c. Both now depend on God for their existence.

The Beginning and the End

In thinking about life, the single most important element we have to learn from the Scriptures is its beginning and end. Secular knowledge can tell us very little about the beginning of life or its end. Science may speculate about origin, but can not by its method discover how things began.

Even conceptually, beginning and end are difficult ideas. Things can have a beginning and end only in the context of time-space extension. But time, space and extension themselves – do they have a beginning and an end?

St.Basil insists that they do. Origen tried to take a more philosophically popular view that the universe had no beginning, that it always existed, since the Creator would not be Creator unless the creation also existed. So if the creation had a beginning, then before the creation, God was not a creator.

Some philosophers would argue that if the creation was not an act of God, then God has changed by the act from a non-creator to a creator. It is hardly worthwhile spending our time on philosophical games. But what St.Basil affirms clearly is some thing different from what many people think. He did not say that the creation had a beginning in time. What he said was that time had a beginning and “before” that beginning , there was no time. , and therefore strictly speaking , there was no “before”.

For Plato, matter is eternal. Origen here follows Plato and Plotinus. So do several others. For Heraclitus every thing, every thing including life, begins from fire. For Thales, water is the source, Anaximenes has the position that air is the beginning of all. Empedocles would say that the four elements are

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the source of every thing. For altruists Leucippus, Democritus and Epicurus, the indivisible atoms (*atomos* = indivisible) are eternal and the source of every thing.

Plato would propose a Divine Artificer, the Demiourgos needed matter which was “there” always. Aristotle also would regard the world as eternal and uncreated.

What we have recently seen returning to western consciousness is this long pagan tradition of the autonomy and self existence of the universe, and therefore of life, as well as of human existence. This is the genesis of a secular civilisation, or of humanism, whether it be western liberal or Marxist.

St. John would say without hesitation “In him (the Logos) was life” (John 1:4). But if the Logos is eternal, and in him was life, then life too has to be eternal. This is the other side of the difficulty. The simplistic interpretation of Genesis 1:20, that life began only on the fifth day of creation, when God said “let waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let winged creatures wing over the earth” (Gen. 1:20) will not do.

Life is eternal, if any thing is eternal, while matter may not be. Life did not spring from matter. In the most primordial sense, life existed in God. No theory of Evolution need detain us from affirming that the eternal nature of life is God, the life that was in Logos, the life that brooded on the deep waters as a dove was God.

The Epistle to the Ephesians: A Study

The Immensity of the Gift:

Scripture: (Ephesians 1-1 to 2-10)

The epistle to the Ephesians is one of the mature products of St. Paul's thinking. In some manuscripts the name of the church to which it was addressed is not mentioned. It is possible that the letter was in the nature of a circular letter meant for various churches while the copy which was actually delivered to the Ephesian church, had the name of the church written therein later on, and included in a collection of the Apostle's letters.

It may be divided into paragraphs containing a few well developed thoughts. There are long sentences in it, covering several verses. The first passage comprises verses 3 to 14 of Chapter 1.

Verses 1 and 2 contain the greeting.

The greeting 'Grace to you and peace from God' is a characteristic Pauline greeting.

The semitic greeting was *Shalom Lika* which is very similar to the Islamic greeting *Salam aleikem* meaning 'peace be to you'. Even now, it is the usual greeting in Israel. The Greek greeting *Khairere* means 'God be gracious to you'. St. Paul has joined the Jewish and the gentile greeting in which he puts the whole of the Christian teaching in a nut shell: By the grace of God we have peace.

Verses 3 to 14 contain a hymn of praise to God. He is basically following the pattern of pastoral letters of those days. We can see this in several ancient papyrus letters discovered in Egypt. He thanks God for many things, but not for any personal benefits. He shades the song of praise with meaning. In this song of praise there are three refrains. The first one ending at v.8 sings Glory to God the Father. The second at v.12 is to Christ and the third at v.14 contains praise to the Holy Ghost. Thus all the three persons in the Holy Trinity are praised.

In the third verse we read: God... has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, in Christ. This statement has the appearance of exaggeration.

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Has God really blessed us with every spiritual gift? God has given us every thing. Only one thing God has not given i.e., to be the original creator of the universe. Barring this, He has given us everything, infinite possibility of power, love and wisdom. This is corroborated by teachings of the early Christian church. He has called us to be like God. God became man so that man may become God. This is the good news. I believe this.

I have heard people thanking God for many things, for the beauty of the sky, for the free air, water, friendship etc. These are all good and important and we ought to be thankful for all these. But the most important thing is that He has called us to be His children - to share with Him, His perfection of love, power, wisdom and to be co-administrators of the Universe with Him. This is what we should thank Him most for. Grace is not merely that He forgives our sins. It is only the first stage. There is much more. I may perhaps illustrate this by a hypothetical example.

A criminal is brought before an arbitrary king i.e., a king who actually judges criminals and awards punishments. He forgives him, not merely that, he asks him to be his son and Crown Prince. This is unbelievable. The Gospel has been unbelievable from the beginning. God does the most improbable things.

God told Abraham who was well over 90, that he will have a child, that his children will be as numerous as the sands on the sea shore etc. Yet Abraham believed it, and it actually happened. The Holy Virgin is so much revered because of her belief - when Gabriel told her that she will have a child - that too before marriage and that child will be the redeemer of mankind, she whole-heartedly believed it, and it actually happened.

Grace is so outstanding. It tears up our imagination. We must expect great things from God, if we want to know his grace.

v. 7. Redemption through blood: This expression is actually reminiscent of ancient practice. It comes from the idea of a covenant. The two contracting parties in a covenant were brought before the Judge. The fingers of the two persons are cut and the wounds placed touching each other so that blood from one flows into the other. The two bloods mix, and they are thereafter deemed to be one person. So they cannot fight.

The sacrificial blood was first sprinkled on the mercy seat or the throne of God and then on the people. Thereby God and Israel are fused.

The importance of forgiveness lies in the dilemma in which man finds himself. He is so made that he can live only in contact with God.

He does not have his being in himself. He is in need of confirmation. He is not sure whether his life has any foundation. When he looks into the depths of his own life he finds an abyss. Man cannot live without God. Sin is a kind of screen or veil, which comes between man and God, and cuts off direct access or communion between the two. The dilemma is this: we can live only if we are in touch with God. But we cannot get in touch with God because of our sin.

Everything evil burns out in the presence of God. If man approaches God, he will perish. If he does not, then also he will perish. Forgiveness is God's special way of removing this dilemma. It is a prelude to man's living in the presence of God. This involves two stages.

(1) God accepts you, as you are, with all your sins - that is the first part.

(2) God tells you what he is up to, what his purpose is, i.e., to unite together in Christ everything in this universe. (Eph.1:10) He makes you a partner in His work. Only thus do we become children of God.

Don't think in terms of what you can get by a few good deeds. God says: Join me in doing what I do. Do this as a son, not as a paid servant.

Verse 10 **Fullness of time:**

This is a legal expression of the Greek word having reference to the hour-glasses used in the courts. Judges appear in the court at the "Fullness of time" (i.e., when the bottom cone of the hour glass becomes full).

Unite together all things - This is an expression for which there is no parallel in other languages.

It is the word used for the sum of a series of numbers or for the process of addition.

The Universe, as we see it is not harmonious. There is discord. In Christ, God will bring together everything in the Universe into a harmonious system which will not be static, but dynamic and growing.

Verses 13 and 14. **Sealed with the Holy Spirit:**

In the early Church, Baptism was accompanied by sealing with oil, which is similar to branding of a slave. The slave is branded with his master's seal, which shows that he is the property of his master. Likewise, we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit as belonging to God. We are later to be like Him who owns us and indwells us. The present experience of the Holy Spirit is an expression only in part, only a foretaste of the Fullness of God which is to be given to us.

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Pledge: *Arabone*. The word used means pledge or earnest money, or first instalment of a deed under which further payments are to follow. The Holy Spirit is to be our very being. Now we have the confirmation that this is true in those limited experiences of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives you assurance about the promise of God.

The Gift of God is so immense - what he gives is not this or that or any small thing. He redeems us from our sins, makes us like Him and makes us sharers and co-workers in the running and administration of the Universe. This is the immense - unbelievably great - gift He has given to us. In perspective of this, all the earthly glories are trivial.

The early Christians felt the jubilation of this and were prepared to suffer any hardship or pain or even death in the name of Christ. In fact Christians became crazy about martyrdom so much that in the 3rd Century A.D. the Church made a rule that no member should go to a persecuting authority to court martyrdom.

The next passage covers verses 15 of Chapter 1 to v.10 of Chapter 2. It is practically a single sentence, which runs up to v.10 of Chapter 2.

Paul's prayer here is that the 'eyes of your heart' may be enlightened. For us the heart is the seat of emotion. For the Jews, emotions are in the bowels. For the Jews, the heart is the direction-choosing centre, it is the inner centre of one's personality which chooses the goals to be pursued in life.

The eye is the perspective in which you see reality, on the basis of which you choose the direction of your life. Paul's prayer is that you should have the proper understanding to know what is really worthwhile in life.

Christ said: My job is to see what the Father is up to and join in the work. That is the job of Christians as well.

The Magnitude of the Power. Eph.2 :11 to 3:21

Why is it that that which God has promised to us appears impossible? People say - I just cannot understand, how I can become God-like.

The first evidence of the fact that God is powerful enough to do what he has promised is to see the power of God to raise Christ from the dead. Many western people consider that the resurrection is not a fact of history. They say, it was only a hallucination of the early Christians.

Some years ago some German scientists conducted detailed

investigations to find if there was any scientific evidence for the claim of Christ's resurrection. After years of enquiry and detailed study of all connected evidence, they came to the conclusion that there was no scientific evidence of Christ's resurrection. This added to the scepticism in the West and the position was like this till about three years back.

But now a German Theologian has challenged this. He asks what sort of evidence would have satisfied the investigators. There was hardly anything. The investigators were not clear about the kind or nature of evidence on the basis of which they could establish the resurrection of Christ. In other words the investigators had already taken a decision against its being a fact even before the enquiry started: no wonder it did not show up any evidence as they were almost begging the question. So the absence of scientific evidence of the resurrection is not now considered as disproving the resurrection. Even for his contemporaries, it was a matter of faith in the testimony of eyewitnesses.

What is the ground for asserting that there is infinite possibility for man? History does not provide adequate reason for such a hope. It is because the resurrection has happened as a historical fact, that we believe in infinite possibilities for man. The source and ground of hope is not an analysis of history, but the resurrection of Christ.

Chapter 1 v. 20 **Sitting at the right hand**

This is a semitic idiom, comes from the semitic durbar. In the decision making Durbars, the Monarch who presides over them, is silent. The man who sits at his right hand *viz.* the Chief Minister or Grand vizier takes decisions and issues orders. He exercises the imperial power, on behalf of the Monarch, from his seat of authority. Here it says that when God raised Christ from the dead, he enthroned him at his right hand, to exercise power and administer the Universe.

v. 23 '**Fullness**' means what is lacking, or that which is necessary to make it full. Thus if a glass is two-thirds full, its fulness is one-third, because that is the quantity required to make the glass full. The word is also used for a patch, because a patch restores the fullness of a torn sheet or cloth. The expression is used in the verse: 'no one stitches up a bit of new cloth to patch an old garment' (Mt. 9:16).

Christ himself is completed by the Church. Total Christ is the historical Jesus plus those incorporated in his body.

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Baptism means, death has no more power over us, because we are participants in the resurrected life of Christ. God has taken us, creatures of dust, and made us sit with him in power in heaven. The gospel of Jesus is that we participate in the resurrection and in the kingship of Christ.

Chapter 2 v.6 - This is a pure gift not earned by us.

Chapter 2 v. 10 – workmanship (Poem in Greek) This word has an artistic connotation. We are his poem, something which a poet creates.

We have been put in this world, so that through our good works, God may be known. Our job is to reveal God, to make it known who God is, through our work, as the poem reveals the poet.

Chapter 2. verses 11 – 22

v. 14 - **Broken down the middle wall.** In the temple at Jerusalem there were different enclosures. Just outside the temple, there is the court of the priests, the court of the women and the court of Israel. Then there is a partition wall beyond which is the court of the gentiles. One of the slabs of the partition wall is kept in the museum at Istanbul. It contains the inscription “if any son of a gentile advances beyond this wall, he has only himself to blame, if death overtakes him.” The gentile was not allowed to go beyond the middle wall. Christ has now broken it and removed the difference between the Jew and the Gentile.

Access to God is the fundamental problem of man. In Jesus, God has given access both to Jew and Gentile. All of us had a wall separating us from God i.e., sin. Christ has removed it.

Chapter 3. In Chapter 3 St. Paul begins an exhortation, but goes into a parenthesis. We can see that the first verse of Chapter 3 is almost repeated in Chapter 4 and the exhortation actually comes in Chapter 4 onwards. In Chapter 3 Paul explains how he was called by God.

Why did God choose the Jews? God chooses the improbable and the impossible. So he chose the Jews. Likewise he chooses us not because we deserve it; but because of his mercy.

God’s purpose is to give both Jews and Gentiles access to God, without a middle wall.

The average Jew did not experience access to God. He would not even mention the name of God. The Jew would not call God. ‘Father’. Jesus

taught us to call God ‘Father’ (Abba is the term of endearment used by a child to call his earthly father).

The power which raised Jesus from the dead is available to you also. So don’t be discouraged at your limitations, failures and sins.

It is not because we are good that he promised to transform us. And it is not dependent on our goodness.

The Life that results: (Eph. 4: 1 to 6:9)

Part II of the Epistle is addressed to the life that results. Chapter 4 begins with the classical passage on Unity. It is a synopsis of the whole Christian life.

Our general idea is that if we do certain things, God will reward us something. Christianity teaches us that it is God who does some thing and we can only do something in response. Because you are God’s sons, you should live like God’s sons. This is Christianity.

Action can be seen in two ways. Usually action is done to gain some particular end. The other view is that you act in a particular way, because you are something. It is an expression of what you are. Act in conformity with what you are. Your doing is a consequence of your being something. If you come to that frame-work, you come close to the concept of ‘*Nishkama Karma*’. Keep on expressing the being you have got, not in order to get something in return, but because such action is the normal issue of your being.

What is the important consequence of this? Humility. This may seem strange. Holiness, meekness and patience. You are called to rule the Universe, with God. The result is meekness, not royal pride. For He who is the true son of God was meek and lowly.

Two major roots of sin are pride and sensuality, of which the former is more difficult to overcome. Where there is pride, there can be no unity. Pride is putting yourself apart from others. Humility is the capacity to subordinate your self to another centre, to live for others, and to be oneself.

Chapter 4 verses 1 to 8 explain the process by which you are incorporated into the Church by Baptism.

verses 4 to 7 - We read the sevenfold “ones”.

One body, one spirit refer to the Unity of Spirit from which one hope of

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all comes. The first three ones, speak about church as the instrument of God's purpose from which the Gospel comes calling men to God's fellowship.

One Lord, one faith, one baptism. 'Lord' is the body of teaching called (*Kurios*) which is formally taught to a candidate for baptism. 'One faith' is the form in which you confess the teaching (the creed). Baptism is the process by which you are incorporated into the church. The candidate who is called by the gospel is "taught of the Lord" "confesses the Faith" and is baptized.

One God and father: Through the Eucharist the Christian is brought to the one God, who is worshipped, who abides in us, and who transcends us.

verses 9 to 16: speak of three elements of dynamic unity.

1. It has a purpose towards which it is moving i.e. mature manhood.

All mankind has to be brought into a single unity in the church. The unity of the church should look forward to the unity of all mankind. This should be the horizon of Christianity. We are accustomed to speak in terms of 'we' and 'they'. No. In Christianity, we have to get over this. We have to keep our horizon wide. Christianity should keep the doors open to all of humanity.

2. The dynamic unity requires a community in which you are rooted. If you have no commitment to any church, you will be swayed by every passing wind. We should train ourselves to be deeply rooted in our church, and transcend the parochialism in it.

3. Speak truth in love does not mean speak an unpleasant truth, politely. "Being true and loving" is a better translation. The words mean 'to be true'. There are barriers between us behind which we generally hide ourselves. Truth means the state of being 'unconcealed'. It means being open in love. But if we are open indiscriminately, we are in danger. Other people sometimes take advantage of it.

Growth is a matter of how the joints work. Each individual can grow in the community only if the joints which connect him with other individuals function properly. Dynamic growth means not only in individuals, but growing in the joints of your contact with other members of the community. The unity of the church means that the congregation is a community, where this kind of unity dwells. The congregation should be a place where you can relax in your community. There should be family familiarity. Your weaknesses are known to me and mine to you. Both of us stand before the

same Lord. There is nothing to hide. Only when there is this kind of “being true in love” in the congregation can the Church really grow.

Chapter 4 v. 18

What does it mean to be a Christian?

St. Paul refers to 8 elements.

(1) The old man lives without a clear orientation or purpose. ‘I’ is the centre of orientation. Immediate pleasures drive us on. But they are illusory and deceptive. That means your love is centred on yourself. Orient yourself in Christ. For the new man, the orientation is God’s purpose. He lives not for himself and his pleasures, but for fulfilling the purpose of God.

(2) v.25. Throw off falsehood. The Christian must have a kind of relaxed honesty, so as not to take advantage of others difficulties. In the Christian church, don’t take advantage of others and you know others will not take advantage of you. Be yourself: do not pretend, do not hide, do not deceive.

(3) verses 26 and 27: If you feel insulted by somebody, do not keep it in mind. If possible clear up things without delay. Don’t allow the sun to set over it. Explode if you want, but don’t keep the resentment too long. It will go underground to your sub-conscious mind. Don’t nurse a bitterness. It will destroy you and give entrance to the devil.

(4) v. 28. “Thieving” means appropriating for yourself, the fruits of other men’s labours. Instead, work with your own hands and give to others. Produce yourself to give to others : two fundamentally different principles of economics.

(5) v. 29. Bad talk. Avoid bad talk. Now we have more refined instruments to harm or pull down each other, much more powerful than sword, or spear, our use of words. e.g., Slander. In the new man, words are used for edifying for building up your neighbour and not for destroying. Energy used in expression of your animosity should be used in a constructive way.

(6) Avoid sensuality. There are two things to be noted about this.

(i) there is something unusual about sexuality. It is not an ordinary drive like hunger and thirst. It is central to man:

(ii) all energy not used elsewhere, flows into sexuality

(a) Physical energy. Do something to exert yourself physically. Use up physical energy in work, in exercise, in manual labour.

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(b) Mental activity is a way in which a lot of sexual energy can be canalised. Put both the mind and heart into any form of creative activity : study, writing etc.

(c) Channel your emotions (i) in worship, (ii) in compassion for fellowmen. The more you direct your emotions in this direction, the more you get over the distortions of sexuality. Singing loudly in common worship is very good. In our Theological Seminary, the boys get up at 5 a.m. and sing hymns in praise of God for one hour in Syriac, which they do not fully understand. I had doubts whether there was any point in this arrangement. But now, after having seen it work for a few years I find it very useful. You may not fully comprehend the meanings of all the words, but by loud articulation you imperceptibly feel the presence of God and the words go down into your innermost being. Whoever understands the full meaning of the word Hallelujh! But by saying it in a worshipping gathering you join the heavenly choir.

(7) verses 18. Use your time effectively. Do not get your joy from alcohol. Find your joy in singing before God. This is the substitute for alcohol. Be ye drunk with the Holy Ghost. Let the Holy Spirit carry you as a community, in singing.

(8) verses 5:21 to 6: 9. Show reverence to one another in Christ. St. Paul speaks of three relationships.

- (i) The Husband - Wife relationship.
- (ii) Father - Son relationship.
- (iii) Master - Servant relationship.

All these are aspects of our relationship with God. It should be a combination of all three. The relationship should not be on the basis of slavish submission but we should harmoniously fit in with each other.

You would remember Christ's saying that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church. But gates never go up to the church. The church should move. The church is founded on firm rock and the rock moves very slowly. It requires great effort to move - being rock. We should put in great effort and move the church so that it shall knock against the gates of hell, destroying death and free the persons confined within the gates of hell wherever men are not living in the fullness of the joy of God.

Creation and the Standing of Humanity

Scripture:

Psalm 8.

How glorious, Yahweh our Lord, Is Thy Person in the whole World! How celebrated Thy glory in the heavens Even from the mouths of babes and sucklings! Thou hast established it a fortress against thine enemies To check the foe and the adversary. As I look at thy sky, the work of Thy fingers, Which Thou hast decorated with moon and stars, I wonder, what is this human being about whom Thou art so concerned, This Son of Adam for whom Thou dost so care! Thou hast made him lack but little to be God With glory and honour Thou hast crowned him And made him king over the work of thy hands

Setting the universe itself under his feet All sheep and oxen, and even all wild beasts of the open country Bird of sky and fish of sea, all that pass through the oceans as well How glorious, Yahweh our Lord Is Thy Person in the whole world!

Wisdom of Solomon 11:24-25

Thou lovest all things that exist And hast loathing for nothing Thou hast made For hadst Thou hated something Thou wouldst not have made it Hadst Thou not willed it, how would anything have endured? Or how something preserved which Thou hadst not called forth?

Hebrews 1:1-6

In varying measures and different ways God spoke to our Fathers in ancient times through the prophets. Now in these last days He has spoken to us through the Son. He has endowed the Son as the Heir of the cosmos; of course all universes were made through this Son. He is the mirror-image of God's glory, the offprint of His Person. He upholds the universe by the word of His power. Having made the purificatory sacrifice for sins, Christ is now enthroned on the right hand side of the Most High Majesty. His Person has now become as much greater than the Angels as his inherited name is

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superior to theirs. For to which of the Angels did He ever say:

“You are my Son, this day I have begotten you” (Ps.2:7) or again

“I will be to him Father, and he to me a Son” (2 Sam 7:14)

Hebrews 1:14- 2:9

Are they (the angels) not ministering spirits commissioned to serve the interests of those (human beings) who are later to inherit salvation? Because of this we should pay more careful attention to the things we have heard; otherwise we will be drifting from the Truth. For if the words (of the Mosaic Law) administered by angels were so binding that every violation or transgression of the law received a proportionately severe retribution, how can we escape even more serious consequences if we pay no heed to such a great salvation? It received its beginning from the words of the Lord Himself. It was attested to us by those who heard the Lord directly. God himself further attested to it by various signs and wonders, by miraculous manifestations of power, by the distribution of the gifts of the Spirit, all according to His will.

For it was not to the angels that the coming inhabited earth (*he oikoumene he mellousa*) of which we speak was subordinated according to Psalm 8 which is here cited in part). When the text says “subordinated everything” this means that nothing is left unsubordinated. But at the present we do not see the whole universe subordinated to Man. What we actually see is the one who was made a bit lower than the angels, even Jesus, who on account of his suffering and death has now been crowned with glory and honour. It is he who has, by the grace of God, experienced death on behalf of all”.

Notes

(1) The three passages are from the Hebrew-Hellenic-Christian Tradition, which is the only authentic tradition that exists for us. In Christ, God has reconciled Jew and Greek, and the two traditions blended already before Christ; Christ united them and re-created them. That is our tradition: not a so-called Judaeo-Christian tradition which regards anything Greek as inimical to it, as did Harnack and his followers.

(2) The Psalmist in a poetic outburst makes many points at once. Let us reduce them to a banal system, to bring it down to the level of our banal minds.

a) The Creation is a manifestation of the excellence of God. It is a revelation

of His name or Person. God's Name is in the Heaven and Earth, or the universe.

b) The vault of heaven is a symbol of the limits to our thought and comprehension. The Christian tradition must take this symbol seriously and acknowledge these limits which exist both in principle and in actuality. The assumption of some scientists that all reality is in principle objectively knowable has no basis in truth.

c) Compared to the enormity and inaccessibility of heaven (as limit), man appears insignificant. The ground of his significance is not in size, but in God's care and concern for him, in man's being made but little short of God. Later Hebrews found this notice of Man's being God-like frightening and near blasphemous. So the translators of the Greek Old Testament reduces the Hebrew: *Techasrehu m'at me-elohim* into the Greek quoted by Hebrews: *elattosas auton Brachu ti par angelous*.

d) Faith demands a response to all these aspects, i.e.,

- i. God making His glorious name known through the creation
- ii. The recognition of the limits of our comprehension as a response of faith to God
- iii. The acknowledgment of the most high vocation of man, as a necessary counterpart to the confession of his sinfulness.

(3) The doctrine of Creation is not to be taken as the description of an event, but as an acknowledgment of the contingency of all that exists upon Him who is. This universal contingency of all existence is the basis on which to refute the notion that God is concerned only with those who are about to be or likely to be saved. His care extends to the whole creation. Ours, as his children, can be no less. Christianity, when it rightly understands its particularities, can be truly and freely universal in its care for the whole creation.

Faith and Society

Scripture:

Isaiah 29:18-21

“And they shall hear, on that day, even the deaf, the words of the book, Out of their gloom and darkness, even the eyes of the blind shall see. The poor shall receive new joy in Yahweh. The lowly among humanity shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. For the frightening oppressor shall vanish, The scoffing proud will be exterminated. All who are eager to practice evil shall be cut off. Also those who make a man a sinner by word and try to trap him who makes public accusations seeking to send the just complainant empty away.

Luke 6:20-31

And then focusing his eyes on the disciples, Jesus said: “Blessed are the poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God. Blessed are the hungry ones, for you shall be filled with nourishment. Blessed are those what weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, keep you out, revile you, and slander your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice on that day, and dance for joy, for behold your wages are great in heaven. This is exactly what their forefathers did to the prophets.

But you rich, woe to you rich, for you have already had your share of comfort. Woe to you who are so well-fed now, you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will lament and weep. Woe to you when you are well-spoken and popular before all men, for that was what their forefathers did to the false prophets. But I say to those among you who are ready to listen. Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you, pray for those who insolently abuse you. To him who slaps you on the cheek, offer him the other cheek also. From him who robs you your top coat, do not withhold your jacket also. To all who ask

you, give; and from him who lifts away your goods, do not demand their return. And as you wish others to treat you, treat them likewise.

Romans 5:18-21

So then, as through one man's lapse it led to condemnation for all men,

Shall it not also be the case that through one man's righteousness should result the rectification of life for all men? For as through one man's disobedience many received the status of sinners, so also will many receive the status of being righteous. The law intervened only to bring the transgression to fullness, But where sin grew full, grace exceeded all bounds; so that grace may be enthroned through righteousness, resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Notes

(1) The prophetic expectation of salvation from the Lord was certainly not in terms of what we now call "personal salvation". The most impressive prophetic forecasts of the Lord's salvation were in terms of

- (a) the banishment of gloom, darkness and evil from society
- (b) the joy and comfort that was to come to the poor and the oppressed
- (c) a quality of social life characterised by unbounded love.

Why then, and how, did the personal salvation of the soul become the dominant motif of Christian soteriology? Can we detect an element of succumbing to the prevailing gnosticism of the second and later centuries?

(2) If the sermon on the Mount (or on the Plateau, as in Luke) was the parallel to the giving of the law at the hands of Moses on Mount Sinai, how can we make the Mathaeian and Lucan versions of the sermon the basis of a Christian platform for the Kingdom of Heaven? Is the Tolstoyan-Gandhian interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount true to the original intention? What in fact are the basic elements of that intention?

- (a) Laws vs. Spirit
- (b) Structure vs. attitudes
- (c) Obedience vs. freedom

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(d) Being vs. doing

(3) Was the tortuous Rabbinic theology of St. Paul partly responsible for the distortion of the Gospel? The teaching of the Apostle Paul on justification by faith has been taken in a rather individual sense, particularly by the Augustinian-Lutheran-Calvinistic strand in the Christian tradition. This forensic-personal understanding of righteousness and justification seems to do scant justice to the central message of Christ, but it is only one particular interpretation of Pauline theology that obscures the basic teaching of Christ.

(4) The authentic tradition has sought to sort out the apparent conflict in terms of certain basic principles:

(a) the polarity between being-life-goodness-righteousness and nonbeing-death-evil-sin

(b) the fundamental problem of the latter as alienation from the source, and therefore the need for reunion

(c) the dialectic between law-structure-obedience and spirit-grace-freedom

(d) the struggle against misunderstanding spirit, grace and freedom in individual terms alone.

(5) We need today a reinterpretation of Spirit, grace and freedom in both personal and social terms in order to have an adequate doctrine of salvation and justification by faith.

6) This means

(a) reinterpretation of sin as personal-structural

(b) reinterpretation of the limits of legislation and organization

(c) reinterpretation of faith in relation to hope and love, but in a social context

(d) re-formulation of faith itself, moving ahead from the objectifying dogmatic, and from the personal-existential, to the communitarian pragmatic embodiment of assumptions and orientations.

Basic Christian Ethics

Scripture:

Ephesians 4:17ff

So then, this is my word to you, my testimony in the Lord. Your conduct is not to imitate the patterns of gentile culture. Their power of discernment of the good was darkened, because of their alienation from the life of God, because of the fundamental ignorance pervading their social being, because of the insensitivity of their powers of discerning and willing. Having lost their sensitivity for the good, they can only resort to wantonness, yielding themselves to lust without restraint, and all the dirty things which cater to lust. That is not what you were taught in the catechesis given to you in the Lord; presuming you have listened to the Lord and been instructed in him. The “truth in Jesus” (taught to you as catechumens) told you to put away the way of life that pertains to the old humanity, characterized by the disintegration that follows the pursuit of deceitful lust you were asked to be renewed by the spirit in your very mental outlook, and to be clothed with the new humanity, which is the original pattern created by God in his image, which is lived out in righteousness, holiness and truthful integrity.

See Ephesians 4:25ff

1) Put away falsehood. Speak the truth each with his fellowman, for we are all members of a single organism.

2) You are bitter. But do not sin; don't keep the bitterness till sundown, and don't offer your bitterness as a platform for the devil.

3) The thief (i.e. the appropriator of the fruit of other men's labour). Let him not steal, but rather let him toil with his own hands, to produce what is good, so that he can share it with his fellow human beings in need.

4) Do not allow dirty talk to come out of your mouth but rather, discern and speak what is the good that is necessary for up

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building humanity and for giving grace to the hearers of our words.

5) Do not grieve the Holy spirit of God, which was granted to you as Chrismation, the guarantee of your redemption, which means, take away from yourselves all meanness, all irascibility, all clamour and shouting and all blaspheming - in fact all forms of evil. 4:32ff. Become kind to each other, well disposed, gracious, responding to the way God has been gracious to us. Become thus replicas of God, so to speak, as beloved children are copies of their parents. Conduct yourselves in love - the model for which is Christ himself, who loved us and sacrificed himself, offering himself up as a pleasing sacrifice to God an offering of sweet incense, on our behalf.

5:3ff. Fornication, sexual impurity, all forms of lust and greed may these not even be mentioned among you, as befits persons chosen to be holy. No dirty talk, no silly jokes, no wisecracks - that kind of cheapening of words does not befit holy people, rather, the giving of thanks, the eucharist is the characteristic act. So you are under no circumstances to be participants in their system. You belonged once to their darkness. But now you are light, the sources of light because of the Lord. So your way of life should be appropriate for the children of light. The fruit of light is to be borne by you in all goodness, righteousness, and truth.

Notes

1) Christian ethics is not a matter of laws, rules or principles, but laws, rules and principles are used even by God to bring people to true freedom and maturity. The provisional role of all notions of right and wrong should be carefully understood. The ultimate purpose is that the whole of society will be spontaneously and freely, creatively good, without external constraint or control. Contextualism is also a provisional principle. The final principle or goal, which is not a principle to be used through reasoning is freedom in the good, spontaneous creativity of the good, both the discernment of the good and the will to the good being internally generated by the spirit and not externally provided by law or principle.

2) In structuring a society, including its primary relations of production and distribution, we need, however, to bring the ultimate notions of freedom, love, creativity, spontaneity, self-control etc. into the realm of social goals and programmes. Here is where the quality of life issue becomes central.

3) What do we need to have first? parameters for measuring the quality of life, or orientations for life so that it could have genuine good qualities. Why are we so preoccupied with measurement? Is this also a disease of our

objectifying consciousness? The purpose of measurement and parameters can only be conscientization and reorientation of society. Thus parameters have a very limited function. Orientations are more fundamental.

4) Under orientations, the following points are important:

a) Consumption as a measure and as orientation should be fiercely fought against. But such fighting calls for other concepts which replace them. Selfish greed and acquisitiveness is the major enemy to be combatted.

b) Pleasure needs deeper analysis. Pleasure has some relation to joy and happiness but has to be distinguished from these. Joy and happiness are legitimate points of orientation for the quality of life, but never divorced from the fact of suffering. The question for comfort also needs analysis. The relation between comfort and discipline, the relation between gratification of the senses as a source of pleasure and the sublimation of the pleasure-principle, not by suppressing it in favour of a reality principle, but by seeking fulfillment at a higher level. The Biblical injunction about the deceptive nature of sense-gratification as a goal for life should be analyzed and society should be oriented in accordance with the insights ensuing from that analysis.

c) Aggression - the desire to see the other as a rival and a threat, and the impulsion to react destructively - bitterness, anger etc. needs social analysis.

d) On the positive side, love, joy and peace as three cardinal values should be reanalyzed into socially practicable principles. Perhaps the whole list in Galatians 5:22 should be taken seriously, i.e. love, joy, peace, capacity for delayed gratification, generosity, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and personal discipline (or capacity to control oneself). Community is the context for such analysis. The notion of freedom which plays a central role in Galatians and Romans should be further analyzed as a possible social goal.

e) Other notions which we seek to affirm, but cannot find direct biblical support should also be analyzed, e.g. identity in relation to personal faith.

f) A social theory of labour will be the positive counterpart of combatting acquisitive greed. Ephesians 4:28 (let the thief no longer steal, but let him labour, doing honest work with his hands, in order to be able to give to those in need) seems as good a basis as we can get.

5) But these orientations are notoriously horizontal. Among the passages from the Old Testament cited above, we find the primary of the claims of proper worship of God as the embodiment, perfection and purest expression

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of the Good. How to incorporate the notion of worship into the planning of society in such a way that it does not conflict with the other goals of freedom and community?

6) Equally important is the concern for the trans-historical dimension of existence. Transcendence means more than the fact that man always transcends himself and every historical achievement. History itself is not the final aspect of reality.

The Great Symbol

Scripture: Book of Revelation, 12:1-6.

And a great symbol was seen in heaven!
 A woman, wrapped around in the Sun
 The Moon beneath her feet
 And on her head a crown of twelve stars,
 Pregnant, in labour pains, in agony to give birth!
 And behold, yet another symbol in heaven!
 A great dragon of fire appears,
 With seven heads, each head with a crown,
 The tail sweeping away a third of the stars of heaven
 And hurling them down on the face of the earth!
 The dragon confronted the woman about to give birth,
 in order to devour the child as soon as it was born.
 She gave birth to a son
 Who was to reign over all with a sceptre of iron
 Her child was snatched away to God and to his throne
 While the woman fled into the wilderness.

Those symbols are eloquent. In our tradition the symbol of the woman clothed with the sun stands interchangeably for three realities - for the Mother of our Lord, for the Church persecuted, and for the human race as a whole, in labour pains to bring forth the new humanity.

As the symbol for 'humanity, it speaks to our age in a new way. Clothed with the sun - let us imagine a future humanity sustained by solar energy. Her feet on the moon - that has come true in our decade: humanity has set its foot on the moon. And as for a crown of twelve stars - even in our own century we may manage to go beyond our own solar system. The next century may take us to a dozen stars which will be added to our crown.

But the important thing is that even with a dozen stars on our crown, the new humanity will still have to be born. With the sun harnessed, the moon colonized and space travel to a dozen solar systems established, humanity will still be great with child, in the pains of labour. And as it is about to give birth, she is faced by the fire-dragon, with enormous power capable of sweeping away a third of the stars in our galaxy.

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That is where we are, already. The fire-dragon appears on the horizon, as the way to the sun and the moon and a dozen stars becomes clear through our science and technology.

We need to trust in God that the fire-dragon will not be able to devour the new-born humanity. God is more powerful than the fire-dragon with its star-sweeping tail. The new humanity, about to be born, is in God's hands, and its destiny is to be before the throne of God. But let us not make any mistakes with our Science and Technology and play into the hands of the fire-dragon.

May the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, abide with all of us, with our present humanity, and the new humanity about to be born, for ever and ever. Amen.

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Litany for Peace

Lord and Creator of humanity, have mercy on this race of ours! In your image it was created, to live in peace and joy, reflecting your glory. Look at us now!

Swords and spears we have learned to make, to maim and kill, to oppress and to exploit. Now guns and rockets, bombs and tanks!! We lust and covet, we fight and destroy, for our lusts and desires have overpowered us. Our greed has become insatiable.

Have mercy on us, Lord!

We have the borders of our own lands and seek fellowship with others only as our desires and our greed drive us. We go out only to plunder and rob, to steal and exploit, through our trade policies and our commercial strategies. We are still as greedy as ever, still as violent, still as oppressive.

Have mercy on us, Lord!

By our greed and lust, by our pride and selfishness, we have made this world, a place of strife and struggle of war and terrorism. We spend a major portion of the fruit of our labors to fight our brothers and sisters in other lands or in our own. Have compassion for our miserable plight!

Have mercy on us, Lord!

Teach us to seek justice and to pursue peace, not seeking our own, but serving the interests of the poor and needy, the oppressed and the exploited. Teach us to labor in love without greed, in order to serve in dignity and serve the needs of our fellow human beings. Teach us not to covet, not to exploit, not to oppress.

Teach us the ways of peace, Lord!

Help us who are gathered here to see our own role in a greed-based, oppressive and exploitative economy. Rescue us from this oppressive set-up, in which we are more often on the side of the oppressor than the oppressed. Rescue us from our narrow loyalties, from our addiction to privilege and comfort, pleasure seeking, from our local, racial or national parochialism. Teach us to look upon all humanity as one family to whose common interests we are all committed.

Teach us the ways of peace, Lord!

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Kindle in us the quest for peace with justice, Lord! We know not where to seek it, though we know that it is only as we commit ourselves and apply ourselves to the pursuit of peace with justice, that we can know the way forward. Deliver us from the shackles of indifference and self-interests, from laziness and love of comfort and pleasure, from vain speaking and from the desire for empty praise and unearned glory from the distracting pursuit of thousand follies, from a false perception of what is the true good, from every lie and terror, from word without verity, from all that alienates from you, our Creator!

Teach us the ways of peace, Lord!

We are constantly destroying our ecology and we are affected with all kind of new diseases! Teach us to join pace with the rhythm of the ecosystem of the earth and the universe which are your creation!

Teach us the ways of peace, Lord!

Teach us the process of human becoming, through interaction with nature and through interrelation with other human beings in social labor, with a critical assessment of human social activity in science and technology and in political economy!

Teach us the ways of peace, Lord!

Help us with courage, Lord! We need courage to stop stockpiling and start disarming. We need courage not to waste and not to consume more than what is good for all of us together. We need courage to trust our fellow human beings. We need courage to start shaping a new world economy based on peace with justice.

Grant us courage, Lord!

We need wisdom to know how to order our lives as a world community. We need wisdom to know what are the values worth living for, so that we do not lose our souls in the mad pursuit of a foolish affluence. We need wisdom to know how to achieve the training of the masses of men and women for seeking their own liberation and for building the right kinds of societies.

Grant us wisdom, Lord!

We need power, power to withstand the unjust oppressors, terrorists, power to resist the blandishments and seductions of power itself. We need power to imagine and to create. We need power to see visions and to pursue the truth. We need power to build a world of peace with justice. We need power to hope, to struggle and to strive. We need power to create what is good and joyous, peaceful and just.

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Grant us the right kind of power, Lord!

And most difficult of all, we need power to love! We need to know your love, so that in that love alone we seek our security. We need to know your love, in order that we may not be afraid to love. Â We need to love, for love is the sign of your presence, and without love neither peace nor justice is worth very much.

Teach us both to know your love, and to be unafraid to love, Lord!

