

**Preface
to the Lay Life**

By

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Ndala

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Contents

Preliminary notice	vii
Preface to the <i>Preface</i>	ix
Chapter 1: The Christian Vocation	1
The emergence of the layman	1
The Christian vocation	4
Christian humility	9
Christian love	17
Chapter 2: Loving as God Loves	29
God's independence from his world	29
Goodness and badness	31
How God looks at things	39
God's "plan" and what actually happens	40
God's will and his law	41
Loving as God loves	44
Life as fun	53
Loving as Jesus loves	54
Jesus' love and the Beatitudes	59
Jesus' love and obedience	60
Self-love and love of self	62
Chapter 3: The Lay Vocation	66
God's love and prayer	66
Sanctity	70
The three states of life	75
Discerning a vocation	86
Chapter 4: The Layman at Home	101

Contents

Sexual ethics	101
Marital ethics	110
The phenomenology of sexuality	125
Christianizing sexuality	133
The Christian homosexual	141
Christianizing marriage	146
Chapter 5: The Layman and his Money	154
The poverty beatitude	154
The Christian and others' poverty	157
The phenomenology of money	163
The Christianization of money	169
Avoiding materialism	174
Money and the "value of a person"	183
Values and necessities	189
Chapter 6: The Layman at Work	196
The phenomenology of work	196
Christianizing work	203
The Christian scientist	214
The Christian scientist and dogma	217
Submission to the facts	221
The Christian engineer	224
The Christian artist	232
The Christian entertainer	241
The Christian advertiser and laborer	246
The Christian at play	250
Chapter 7: The Layman in Society	254
The phenomenology of society	254
The common good	260
Social justice	265
The Christian and law	274
The Religious and the layman	282
Responsibility in a group	286

Contents

The Christian bureaucrat	298
The Christian politician	302
The layman in the Church	305
Chapter 8: The Training of the Layman	315
Intellectual training	316
Training in prayer	319
Ascetical training	321

Preliminary Notice

In spite of the objections some may raise, I am going to use the term “layman” throughout this book instead of the “gender neutral” term “lay person.” The reason is that, as I see it, there is a subtle but important difference between a “lay person” and a “layman.”

A lay person is a person who happens to be in the lay state. A layman is a person whose essence is characterized by the lay state that he is in. Every layman is a lay person, but not every lay person is a layman, though perhaps he or she ought to be. People, for instance, who are utterly indifferent to their status are lay persons, but they are not really laymen. A layman is someone who is in the lay state and is trying to reach Christian perfection precisely *as* a member of the lay state. This is the person to whom this book is directed, as well as to those Religious or clerics who want to become clear about how precisely they differ from laymen.

I am also going to refer to the layman using the generic personal pronoun “he,” rather than the awkward “he/she.” To say that this generic pronoun excludes women mistakes the form for the meaning. It is as silly as to say that the pens we write with are the same as the pens we keep pigs in just because the form of the words happens to be the same.

And the attempt to achieve “gender neutral” language by avoiding the generic personal pronoun is Theologically dangerous. If in referring to God, we replace “he” by the noun “God” (as some feminists are trying to do), then by implication we are depersonalizing

Contents

God. So in order to avoid by implication “masculinizing” God, we are implying that God is not a person at all; we imply that he is neuter, an “it.”

But God does not *lack* sex; he is not neuter. Think of clear glass; it does not lack color, or it would be black. But by the same token, God does not *contain* all genders, any more than clear glass contains all colors, because what contains all colors is white. No, God *transcends* sex, in the sense that masculine or feminine or neuter terms do not apply to him as such, even though he *is* a person (in fact, three persons).

But the only English pronoun that is a *personal* pronoun and does not have any gender is the generic personal pronoun “he.” That’s just a fact of the language, which remains a fact, even if people deny it.

I think I should also remark that, while it is sometimes legitimate to use “person” instead of “man,” the term cannot *replace* the generic “man” (which comes from the German *Mensch* rather than the masculine *Mann*), or the term “human being.” The reasons for this are: (1) that there are persons that are not human beings (angels and the three persons of the Trinity), and (2) there is one complete human being who is not a human person (Jesus, who is a divine person).

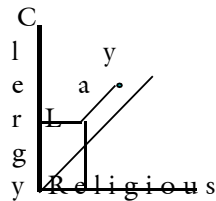
And in this connection, it is interesting to note that while the greatest human being, Jesus, is a man, the greatest human *person*, Mary, is a woman. The Catholic religion is anything but demeaning to women; Mary is a greater person than angels, even though she is a human being, for the simple reason that she, in being the mother of God almighty, was in a position of authority over God himself. *There* is a mystery for you!

Preface to the *Preface*

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As a preface to this preface to the lay life, I think I should say at the outset that ostensibly this book is directed at Catholics. There are several reasons for this. First, I am a Catholic, and naturally my idea of the expression of Christianity is within the context of Catholicism. Secondly, it is Catholicism that has undergone the recent upheaval that has led to the emergence of the layman and occasioned this book. Thirdly, it is the Catholic Church that gives prominence to all three of the different states of life I distinguish, and so makes it easier for me to focus on what is distinctive about the lay life.

Nevertheless, I do not think that what I have to say applies only to Catholics; and there are certainly some times when my remarks will sound, especially to traditionalist Catholic ears, as very Protestant. If Christianity is an attitude, then it should be the same one for all Christians, however its inculcation and expression is institutionalized. In that sense, I hope what I have to say contributes to ecumenism



Preface to the *Preface*

The idea this book is built on can be expressed by saying that the Christian life is like a mathematical “volume,” of the kind that you would study in trigonometry, with its three axes of the Religious, the clerical, and the lay states at right angles to each other, all emanating from a common origin, as in the illustration above.

No one can be a Christian without being somewhere in this space; and the “style” or type of Christianity a person lives is defined by which axis or axes he is closer to. But the person’s “degree” of living the Christian life—what used to be called his “perfection”—depends on how far away he is from the origin, not how far he is from any given axis.

I would think it would be impossible for any real person to find himself exactly on any one of the axes, because they describe the absolutely pure states of life, and in fact every Christian to some extent must embody all three attitudes, and so belong to some extent to all three states. But by the same token, it would be the rare Christian who expresses all three attitudes to exactly the same degree, and so finds himself equidistant from all the axes. In general, he will be closer to one than the other two; and so he will be called by the name of the axis whose orientation he more clearly expresses. That is, a “layman” will be more of a layman than a Religious or cleric; a cleric will be more of a cleric than a Religious or layman, and so on. The “mixed” states of life have two attitudes so closely balanced that it is not in practice possible to decide which is “truer” of the person.

Of course, what I will be doing here is describing the “pure” lay state, pretty much, not trying to describe any actual person who exists. Laymen will find that this description fits them better than any other description of the Christian life. Of course, in order to talk about the lay state as a pure state, I will have to say something about the other states, in order to show how it is different from them. In that sense, this book is not just about Lay Christianity.

Preface to the *Preface*

To answer the reaction that if a description of the pure state is a description of an abstraction and not reality, and so is useless, I can say that one of the problems all the states of life in the Church are in at the moment is that people don't know what the various states as such are driving at. We find nuns, for instance, seeking their "perfection" as Religious Christians by doing what is essentially lay Christianity; and we find laymen joining groups that are little uncanonical Religious orders in the name of the Christian perfection of their lay lives; we find priests taking over lay jobs as part of their priestly work, and laymen thinking that they are better Christian laymen if they get involved in being extraordinary ministers of Communion, and so on.

There is nothing wrong with mixing these aspects of the Christian life. The point is that the layman does not enhance his *lay* Christianity by taking over reading at Mass or serving Communion, any more than the priest is a better priest for doing the parish account books.

Another way of putting the point of this book, then, is that the three states of Christian life are qualitatively, not quantitatively, different. No state of life is "in itself" better or "more Christian" than either of the others—in spite of what many Medievals held about the Religious life.

These are different kinds of Christian expression, not different degrees of it; and they are different kinds of Christian expression because there are different kinds of people, who find their assimilation to Christ our Prince in different ways. If you are a lay type of person, adopting Religious Christianity is not to choose a "better" life—either in itself or for you. The lay life is better for you, and is not better or worse in itself than the Religious life or the life of the cleric.

There are those who will disagree with this thesis. This book, then, is not for these people. I am going to assume it, and show how it fits Christianity (i.e. why there are three distinct states of life).

Preface to the *Preface*

The reason is that this book is not a book on the dogmatic constitution of the lay state, but a book of basic ascetical Theology: that is, it is a beginning of an attempt to show how perfection is to be sought as a layman. There are plenty of treatises on “the practice of perfection” in the Religious and the clerical states (which are similar); and it is assumed that these practices carry over with modifications into the lay state.

What this book tries to show is that this is false. The layman’s task as a lay Christian is not to follow “as far as he can” the Counsel of Virginité (“Blessed are those who make themselves eunuchs for my sake”), nor that of poverty (“Blessed are the poor in spirit”) and so on. These, as Jesus said himself, are advice only for certain kinds of people. But he gave other advice (“make friends with the ‘mammon of iniquity’—corrupting wealth”) that have not been heeded because this counsel doesn’t fit the Religious vocation, and writers on ascetical Theology up to the present have been writing for Religious or those who want to imitate Religious.

Another point that is implied in the fact that this is the ascetical and not the dogmatic Theology of the lay state is that what I am going to be saying is not going to sound much like what is found in the documents of the Second Vatican Council on the laity. Their focus is to discuss the place of the layman in the Church (which is really one aspect of the dogmatic Theology of the laity); my focus is how you go about being a lay saint. I am familiar with the documents, and (I hope) nothing I say here contradicts anything in them; but since (as a little exploring in this book will reveal) the focus is so different, you will not find me quoting them and trying to draw implications from them. Not that that sort of thing is not extremely valuable; it is just that what I am trying to do here is different.

Unfortunately, this is just a beginning, because the subject of a lay

Preface to the *Preface*

ascetical Theology that is qualitatively different from Religious asceticism is a totally new field. I hope here to break the ground; others will have to come after with the harrows and the rakes and the seeds before the crop can even begin to grow, let alone be harvested.

Chapter 1

The Christian Vocation

The emergence of the layman

When a child is born, a new, independent reality reveals itself to the world. But the child has, in fact, been in existence already for some time; though outsiders know of him only as a change in his mother. She knows, however, that he is real, that he is not herself, and that in a sense he is more independent before birth than afterwards. Before birth he took what he needed from his mother's body, whether she was willing to give it to him or not; afterwards, if she forgets to care for him or neglects it, he dies. And the transition between the two states is painful and fatally dangerous both for the mother and for the child, though it is a transition as natural as life.

Something like this describes what is happening in the Church today with the layman. Laymen have been in the Church from the very beginning; they were conceived at the moment of the marriage of the world with God. But until quite recently, they have been *in* the Church; and though the Church knew of their existence, and so did the laymen, they appeared as part of the body of the Church itself. And the Church mothered them, giving herself to them, shielding and protecting them, and occasionally listening to the stirrings within her.

But the labor pains began not too long ago, with Theologians like

Yves Congar pointing out the special role that laymen have, the Christian function that only they can perform properly. And the pains have grown more severe and more frequent, and the fear of death has been upon the Church—and on the laymen in it also.

But I think this stage has been passed, and now our voice—so much like squalling, so often—is heard in the world. And the Church looks at this wrinkled thing and wonders whether this infant is going to grow up to be a good son, or will become a monster, destroying both himself and her. It can happen.

Like all children, the layman is, in one sense, fully developed, and in another not yet anything. He is independent now in one sense—an obvious one: he can follow his own conscience and he knows it—but in another and more subtle sense more dependent than ever. How do we find what the Holy Spirit wants us to do? The experience of Protestantism should teach us that we can't simply rely on our own unguided perception of inner promptings. There is more than one spirit operating in this world, and the one that most looks like an angel of light is apt to be the wrong one.

But the Church depends on laymen now too, if for no other reason that there is a real sense in which we have escaped the kind of control the Church used to have over us. We have become aware of ourselves as realities in our own right. But if we continue, as we have begun, to look at ourselves one-sidedly, and try to seize total control over ourselves, we are doomed as Christians, and the Church is in for a regression perhaps greater than it has ever experienced before.

We face the dilemma of all new life: it is impossible to go back to the womb, and it is equally impossible to strike out on our own just because we can now breathe on our own. We are bound to resent the Church when she tells us not to do what we want to do, or even what we think is best for us to do. But how much of this resentment comes from the Holy Spirit, how much even from reason; and how much is it the tantrum of an infant who will have his way no matter what the consequences? We feel much; we do not know much.

I think we had better get rid of the notion that the layman has at last come of age. We have not; we have merely come out of hiding, and have a long way to go before we can dare to call ourselves mature. Everywhere we show the signs of childishness, and it is the wise child who knows he is a child. We speak out on questions we have not studied, and are amazed when we are patronized by those who have studied; we want “dialogue,” by which we mean that those in authority are to “listen to” us, by which we mean that they are to do what we want. The sign of this is that we complain that there is no “dialogue” when we very clearly lay out our position before a Bishop or the Pope, and they don’t change anything because of what we said. We accuse others of “only seeing part of the issue,” when they don’t act as if the part we see so clearly were the whole story. We interrupt, because we are afraid that if we do not, we will not get our side into the discussion.

On the other hand, it is a wise parent who knows what a child is. The Church is not fully aware of potential we have, and should not act as if it is. We do have a different point of view, and even if it is stridently expressed, we should not for that reason be ignored. We can be guided, but we can no longer be “formed”; our mold and form is within us, and it cannot be transformed into someone else’s idea of what it ought to be. Many of us are more learned—even in sacred matters—than the clergy who are our pastors; we read, we examine, we think; and we can no longer be simply told the naive tales that convinced us centuries ago. We are persons, and though we can be commanded and threatened, we develop when we are persuaded, and even more when we are left alone, dangerous as this may be.

Ultimately, it is up to us laymen what we become. We are, to be sure, independent; the Church, as I will say later, is a guide each of us has for forming his own conscience, not something that has ultimate control over our lives (a dangerous statement this, but one that has always been held).

We are the ones who know ourselves from within, even though this

self-awareness is very vague still. In some respects, the Church knows more about us than we do; but it does not know in the same way, and does not know, by any means, all there is to know. But in any case, since we are free, our growth and the direction of our development depends on our own knowledge.

When a child reaches adolescence, he stops finding out what he is potentially, and makes the decision to be what he wants to be. We laymen have not yet reached this happy state of anguish; we have a great deal to find out about ourselves as Christians first. We are like the boy who wants to be a fireman without knowing concretely what it means to be a fireman or what he is and whether this life suits him. One who decides to live a life before he has some real knowledge decides to live an abstraction; and his dream shatters against the unforeseen reality.

What I think we need, then, and what this book is about, is a certain objectivity and balance in matters Christian. We need fervor and eagerness, to be sure; but I submit that our present condition supplies that without any artificial effort to drum it up. What is really the pressing need now is knowledge: knowledge of what we now are, knowledge of what we ultimately can be; knowledge of how we can get there; knowledge of how fast we can travel without falling down; knowledge of how we fit in to both the Church and the world; and knowledge of what is likely to happen depending on what course of development we take. We are bound to take some course, and it will be a good course only, I think, if it is an intelligently chosen one.

The Christian vocation.

This objectivity and balance is all the more necessary for a Christian, because Christianity itself and every phase of Christianity is an irreducible paradox, which must be lived without regarding it as a problem to be solved or a dilemma whose horns must be avoided.

That is, Christianity, as supra-rational, appears to reason as a contradiction (which is, perhaps, why Jesus was a “sign of contradiction”); and reason always tries to explain a contradiction to its own satisfaction. But to rationalize Christianity is to remove its supra-rational character, and so is to destroy it.

Hence, the Christian has to know both sides of the contradiction and reveal them in his life, in such a way that his life shows that the paradox which he is living is in fact the living truth.

The layman is perhaps more aware of the strange nature of Christianity than is the Religious or priest, because the layman is called to a life that he is already—apparently—living.

Immediately, as laymen, we must force ourselves to avoid the tendency of reason to resolve this dilemma by assuming that we must add something to our lives in order to respond to the call. We take it for granted, based on our observation of priests and Religious, that to be a Christian we must do something different; and since we are in the world, our attempt to Christianize it has shown up in the attitude that Christianity is some kind of social work.

But the result of this is becoming apparent. Atheists are as interested in social work as Christians are, and can do as good a job at helping people as Christians can do. Atheists can love the poor as much as Christians do, and can work for them as hard as Christians can. It is increasingly difficult to see what the difference is between a Christian social worker and an atheistic social worker—especially since the Christians seem to be following the atheists in their programs, not the other way round.

Yet if our lives are the evidence to the world that Christianity is true, then if there is no blatantly observable difference between the Christian and the atheist, then we have proved that Christianity is false. Our “witness” has become a witness that it really makes no difference to be a Christian. In attempting to make Christians relevant to the world, we have succeeded in making Christianity appear irrelevant; and if it is irrelevant, it is false.

So it is time to sit back and look at Christianity and ourselves. When we do this, we find that Christianity, as involving the supernatural, has never really been adapted to any age, but has always attempted, not always successfully, to adapt the age to itself as the truth of any age. But nothing can adapt a culture to its reality if its reality is not beyond that culture. Hence, Christianity will always appear irrelevant; but its very relevance is its apparent irrelevance.

The only proof of the truth of Christianity the Christian's life can give to the atheist is that the Christian can be happy *in this life* consistently with his Christianity in a way that the atheist cannot, consistently with his atheism. The atheist is not interested in "transcendence"; he is interested in the here and now; and it is the life here and now of the Christian which is supposed to prove to the atheist that the transcendent actually exists. And the only way the Christian can do it is somehow to show that life here and now can make sense and be consistent only on the supposition that Jesus is in fact the Supreme Being humanized, and that he died and came back to life to rescue us from our perversity. But I submit that you can't do this by trying to show the atheist, "See; we can do everything you can do." What this book is about is, if you will, true Christian witness. How does the Christian show by his life the truth of Christianity?

If the relevance of Christianity is its apparent irrelevance, if the transcendence is revealed in the happiness in this life, then this is another instance that shows that the Christian is called to a state that is paradoxical and apparently contradictory.

But let me return to an analysis of the earlier paradox I mentioned, that the Christian layman is called to the state he seems to be in, and say that we are not to suppose that the Christian is first called to the Christian life, and then some Christians have an additional call to either the Religious life or the priesthood. This supposes that the lay life is the "generic" Christian life, and the other states are special "higher" states, which contradicts the thesis of this book.

No, the Christian call from the very beginning is to one or the other of the three states of life, because the call lies in one's own abilities and native interests, and the three types of Christianity are qualitatively distinct expressions of the Christian mystery as lived in the person. So the Religious life is not a vocation added to that of being a Christian, but a limitation of the Christian vocation to that of being a certain way of living Christianity. Similarly, the lay life is not the "basic Christian life," but a different sort of limitation of what it means to be Christian.

That is, the "lay life" in which a person spends his early years is not really the Christian lay state, any more than life as a child is strictly speaking human life—still less, the "generic" human life that is "added to" by the life of an adult. In childhood, a person is developing himself, and life is really defined by the mature condition, not the other way round.

It is the same with the Christian life. One is called in childhood by means of his potential into either the lay state or the Religious or the clerical state, or some combination of the three; and it is not a quibble to say that the person is called into the lay state, because the condition of a child and that of a person on his own are very different. In this sense, one is called away from childhood into adulthood—and into the adulthood that suits him.

Of course, this means that the "Christian vocation" as such is that abstraction discovered by comparing what each of the states of Christian life has in common with the others, and is not a life that a person can ever live as such—more or less as "humanity" is what either sex has in common with the other, but no one can be a human of neither sex.

But it is nonetheless of supreme importance to know what this common element in every Christian vocation is, so that we can know how to distinguish Christian living of a certain type from the life of non-Christians who do the same thing.

Superficially, we tend to equate the Religious, and perhaps the clerical, lives with “living Christianity to the full” because it would seem that monks, nuns, and priests don’t have any counterparts outside of Christianity. But of course there are Buddhist monks, and Jewish and Hindu priests also; and in many respects the practices of both Christians and non-Christians in these orders are similar.

The point is that if there is something distinctive about the Christian vocation, it seems that we will not find it if we look for some special way of acting. When the rich young man asked Jesus, “What should I do to earn eternal life?” Jesus answered, “What do you read in the law?” But this was to do what any good Jew would do. True, when the young man answered that he had done all this since the time he was very young, Jesus answered, “If you want to be complete, there is one thing left: go sell what you have and give it to the poor and then come follow me.” But the act of impoverishing oneself is obviously not distinctively Christian; again, Buddhists do this, and so do Stoics. No, the selling was a condition for the distinctively Christian thing: “follow me.”

But what does that mean? Obviously, to do what Jesus did. But not the acts that Jesus did; we can’t walk around Israel preaching and doing miracles. No, “follow me” must mean what St. Paul said it meant in his letter to the Philippians: “Your attitude is to be the one that was in Prince Jesus, who when he possessed God’s form did not consider being equal to God something he had to keep hold of; he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, and turned himself into what was the same as a human being; and once he found himself in human shape, he lowered himself so far as to submit obediently to death, and death on a cross.”

What is distinctive about Christianity, then, is not an action but an attitude, not what you do, or even why you do it, but the spirit in which you do it; it is how we do things, rather than why or what we do that makes us Christian. Any action that is moral can be Christian (Paul points out that you can’t “Christianize” immoral acts by saying

that you did them with the Christian attitude—there is a contradiction here); but by the same token, that same act, lacking the Christian attitude or outlook is—though morally good—not Christian.

Similarly, Christianity is not a matter of motives, really. Any morally good motive for a good act can be Christianized; but in itself a morally good motive is not Christian. Not even to help others because of love is in itself Christian. There is nothing anti-Christian in it, but it could be Buddhist-style love or atheistic-humanist-style love. If it is not the expression of the attitude Paul talks about, it is not Christian love, and if there is nothing distinctively Christian about it, it is not Christian witness.

Christian humility

But let us then look at the attitude more closely. The Christian call seems to be, negatively speaking, away from oneself. “A person who loses his life for my sake will find it.” “Unless a person repudiates himself, takes up his cross and follows me, he can be no student of mine,” said Jesus.

There is a more literal sense here than we generally think. When we speak of self-denial, what we ordinarily mean is giving up the use of something that is *not* ourselves (“I will deny myself this ice cream,”) usually for the sake of self-mastery: to gain greater *possession* of ourselves.

But that sort of thing is Stoicism, not Christianity. To be “free from attachment to the things of the world” so that you are in control of your destiny is the Stoic ideal; and if anything, it is the very opposite of the Christian attitude. The Christian, in a real sense, is not in control of himself; he has given *himself* up.

That is, we must give ourselves up, to be Christians, not for the sake of self-development, or even for the sake of the recovery of ourselves later, but absolutely. We are not to be interested in ourselves, just as Jesus was not interested in himself when he became

man and submitted to that horrible death. What did he have to gain in self-fulfillment from it?

I hasten to add that the result of this abandonment of oneself is a recovery of a transformed self. “We are transformed to God,” as St. Paul said; but this cannot be the motive for the abandonment. If this greater self is the motive for the self-denial, then the self-denial is not self-denial but self-affirmation; motive implies interest, and if you are “not interested in yourself” because of the greater you that comes from it, you are feigning disinterest, and doing so interestedly. You are lying. Self-denial for the sake of self-fulfillment makes self-denial impossible.

Let me say here why this giving up of the self is necessary. Christianity is really for those who have sinned; if there had been no sin, Jesus would not have redeemed us, because there would be no point to redemption.

When a person sins, he makes a choice which puts him at cross-purposes with himself; he sets up a goal for himself which in one respect or other he knows can't be achieved, because to achieve it would be a contradiction. For instance, a thief wants the money he steals to belong to him—because he uses it as if it does belong to him—but he knows that the act of taking it against someone's will does not make it really belong to him; and his use is a pretense that contradicts the reality.

What the thief does not realize is that his choice is a spiritual act, and as such is an eternal act, one that he cannot get rid of, but can only forget now that he has a body and a brain. Once he dies, this act, along with every other conscious act he has ever had, will reawaken and be eternally present to him; and with it will reawaken the self-defeating ambition contained in it. He will, in some respect, be eternally frustrated, having a goal he intends to achieve and knows he can never achieve. This, of course, is the essence of hell.

But that choice is not a “part” of his mental reality, as if it could be

removed and leave the rest the same. It *defines* him as the person he is; each of us is the person he makes himself by the sum of his choices. The choice permeates everything else about the person's consciousness, poisoning his whole spiritual reality, casting its color over everything.

But this means that, to be free of that sin, the person has to become someone else: that different person he would have been if the choice had not been made. And this is a person who (in some respect) is different as a whole.

We can see this, I think, when we consider the alcoholic's fear when he realizes that he has got to give up drinking. The drink is not the real problem. The real problem is that it has become such a part of everything about him that he says, "But if I give this up, who will I be?" He realizes that it is not the drink he has to give up; it is the drinker.

And the same is true of anyone who has ever sinned. You can't give up the sin without giving up the sinner; and who will you be afterwards? You don't know. You will afterwards recognize yourself; but you can't predict beforehand what the later self will be like.

So that is one reason why the Christian vocation is an actual giving up of oneself; it involves becoming a different person. It is also why the Christian vocation is a call. Actions ordinarily originate from us because of our interests, and hence are relevant to ourselves and our self-fulfillment. True self-forgetfulness must ultimately originate from outside.

Hence, we cannot choose Christianity, because there is no possible motive for choosing it; we must be chosen. "You have not chosen me; I have chosen you," says Jesus. The fact that once a person is Christian, the self is transformed into something infinitely greater than it was is another of the paradoxes and mysteries of Christianity. Christianity is itself for the Christian, even while it impels him to act not for his own sake.

Let us pause a moment to notice a practical implication of this. We cannot really persuade others to be Christians, because, if we are honest, we cannot give them a motive to be Christian. If we delude them by uttering the half-truth that if they are Christians they will be happy—in the hope that, desiring happiness, they will be converted—we are cutting off from them the only means to Christian happiness: lack of concern for one's own happiness. A Christian is happy, both here and hereafter, only to the degree to which he is indifferent to his own happiness. No, we can only provide the opportunity for others to be Christian; it is the grace of the Master Himself which will effect the transformation. Nor should we think that we can use persuasion at the beginning, and let God take over once our listeners have made the first step. This sometimes works, because God uses our mistakes; but it is cheating, and even for the Christian the end does not justify the means.

But then how to “provide the opportunity” for grace? By being Christian. We make ourselves different, this difference reveals itself, and the non-Christian sees it, not precisely as personally beneficial, but as true and good. Who has not been inspired by seeing someone not interested in his own gain? His life is a mystery to others, they read all sorts of hidden motives into what he does; and if his life shows that these motives are not really at work, then that life becomes itself a call to others. “It can be done,” it says. It seems too beautiful and good to be true, but it can be done.

Here we have another facet of the Christian paradox. It is not just that the persuasion comes from not overtly persuading, but from living one's own life and not trying (by a kind of reverse hypocrisy) to hide what one is doing; but it is what the life reveals: the only human life, given sin, that can make sense, is the life that is beyond reason. What makes life reasonable is something that itself can't be put into a rational scheme; foolishness, as St. Paul says, is revealed as greater wisdom than human wisdom itself.

The name, of course, for this lack of interest in oneself and one's own fulfillment is Christian humility. But we must be clear about this word; like all Christian concepts, it has a thousand perversions that masquerade as "true humility."

First of all, it is not self-depreciation or "modesty." St. Paul was anything but "modest," and he himself admits in his first letter to Timothy that he was a "conceited ass." Yet he was humble in the true sense. Here is what he says, for instance, in the fifteenth chapter of the First Letter to the Corinthians:

"I am the lowest ranking representative; I don't even deserve to be called a representative of the Prince, because I tried to destroy God's community. I am what I am because of God's free gift—and his gift to me has not be wasted; I have worked harder than anyone else. But even this is not my doing; it is God's gift with me that did it.

"Anyway, what difference is it what I did or they did? This is what our proclamation says..."

The humility is not in the first part ("I am the lowest, etc."); this is a statement of fact; nor, precisely, in the second ("I am what I am because of God's free gift), because this is also simply a fact; and it certainly isn't in the third ("I have worked harder"), because here the conceit shows itself.

No, the humility is in the last part. "What difference is it what I did or they did?"

So humility does not consist in running down your accomplishments; it consists in the fact that your accomplishments (or your lack of accomplishments) don't matter to you.

The person who is humble in the worldly sense, who says, "I've never done anything or been anything remarkable; I'm not anybody, really," is not necessarily humble in the Christian sense. Very often the person who doesn't consider that he has done anything worth while is depressed about it, which shows that he cares about the fact that his life hasn't accomplished anything. He might be very accurate in his assessment of his impact on the world—and in that sense (the worldly

sense) he is being truly humble. But the depression shows that that person *wants* to be somebody; he is interested in being significant or being great. He has not given up himself.

Notice that the two greatest saints in Christianity didn't accomplish much of anything at all. Mary's great accomplishment, really, was to agree to be the mother of Jesus; and of the ten or a dozen things recorded of her, one of the most significant was that she did the unmotherly act of losing track of her youngster for a whole day. And St. Joseph was just a carpenter who had a dream or two. What else do we know of him?

But why did God create us and die to redeem us if he doesn't want something significant from us? We will have to handle this shortly.

The point here is that self-depreciation is, so far from being Christian humility, often the very opposite of Christian humility.

Nor is humility "truth," as some Christian writers have said. The truth, to be sure, is humbling, given that we can do absolutely nothing on our own. St. Augustine said, "nothing but sin," but we even have to have God's help to sin. Objectively speaking, we have absolutely no value, because nothing, objectively, has any value. And this is not just true for the atheist, but for the Christian too. St. Paul says, writing to the Christians in Galatia, "Because, remember, if a person thinks he is something, when in fact he is nothing, he is fooling himself."

But even though this is the truth, this recognition of one's objective worthlessness is not Christian humility, because it also can cause depression, to the person who cares about the fact that objectively he is not something valuable. It is simply not important to the Christian whether he is important or not. Humility is not the opposite of "having a healthy sense of self-worth," but of not caring whether one is worth a lot or nothing at all, because one does not care about oneself.

In fact, it is really only the Christian who can face the actual truth about himself: that he does not really matter. For the atheist, it

matters whether or not he matters—what else does he have to live for?—and so he must delude himself that he “really does matter” at least to someone. Perhaps he does, of course; we can matter to other people. But perhaps he doesn’t, and most likely he doesn’t really matter much to anyone, and not to very many in any case. Most likely he will not be remembered, even, a generation after his death, and possibly not more than a year after. Can he stand the thought?

But it does not matter to the Christian whether he matters or not; and so if he doesn’t matter, what difference does it make? If he is not remembered afterwards, he can face this, because what matters to him is not himself but God. On the other hand, if he matters vitally to others, even thousands of others, this does not “puff him up,” as they used to say, because it does not matter to him whether he matters or not. Humility can recognize superiority, even; it is that the superiority is of no concern to the person who is superior.

Christian humility, in short, consists in not being important to oneself. Self, fulfillment, happiness, relevance, and all the rest of it, are boring topics to the Christian.

Not many of us are very Christian, are we? But not even that matters.

Notice that humility as a Christian virtue cannot be attained by practice. If you “practice” humility, you are trying to “make yourself better” in this respect, and so you are paying attention to yourself and your development in this virtue; and this particular virtue consists in not paying attention to yourself and your development. Another of Christianity’s paradoxes.

No, Christian humility comes from practice; but it can’t be practiced deliberately as such. A person acquires the virtue of humility by turning away from it—and all virtue—as things to “acquire” so as to be “a better person.” Humility is a gift, not an acquisition. As time goes on, you will be able to say without disappointment what St. Therese of Lisieux said, “I have finally become resigned to being imperfect.”

I think it can already be seen how impossible it is to be a Christian by oneself, and why Christianity cannot be regarded as a philosophy of life. Philosophy builds itself on reason, and everything about Christianity transcends reason, and sounds like a contradiction from the point of view of reason. Not that the Christian avoids reason; he just does not look on it as ultimate.

But if nothing matters, why bother? The answer is, Why not?

There will be those who are now saying, “But I can’t accept this. Christianity can’t mean that I don’t have any real importance, and that it doesn’t really make any difference to God whether I do good or sin!”

It may be that what you mean by this is, “This is not the way I understand Christianity.” In that case, you are simply saying that you read the evidence differently—and presumably are willing at least to consider what I am saying as a possible interpretation of the truth of the faith. There is room for disagreement within Christianity; not even the “correct” interpretation of the Christian message is of ultimate importance (he said, a Catholic sounding dangerously Protestant), because we will all be saved—those of us who will be saved—not only in spite of, but to some extent because of, our mistakes.

But if what you mean is, “I will not accept a version of Christianity in which I don’t have any objective importance, because I will hang on to my importance and accept only those views of life which preserve it,” then I am afraid that I really do not have much that is useful to offer you.

Christian love

I will assume that you are still with me, at least interested in hearing a little more of what I have to say before you give up.

Notice that if I am right, Christianity is not really a matter of

practice so much as theory: it is not what you do, but how you see things that is what makes the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian.

So for those who are impatient at all this theorizing and say, “Yes, yes, but get on with it. What are we supposed to do to make ourselves more Christian?” my answer is, “You are missing the point. Christianity is what the translations used to call ‘penance’ or ‘repentance,’ but whose Greek literally means ‘alteration of mind’: so the task to perform in becoming Christian is precisely this change in the way of looking at things.

And if my description of humility approaches accuracy, you can see that the Christian’s mentality is totally and utterly different from the non-Christian’s.

But of course, humility is just the negative way of looking at the Christian vocation: we are called away from concern for ourselves; but we are called to concern for something else. And concern for something other than oneself is called *love*.

I think I hear a sigh of relief. “Ah, so that’s what it’s all about. If you mean that we love, and because we love we care about others, then you were just being provocative when you introduced it by saying that we don’t care about ourselves. I can handle love.”

Unfortunately, just as there are forms of humility that are not Christian humility, so there are forms—thousands of them—of love which have nothing to do with Christian love.

Love in itself is not distinctively Christian. You could argue that Confucianism is really a philosophy of love; and certainly Buddhism is based on love and not caring about oneself. Atheists love; and atheists’ love can often take on an intensity and a poignancy that no Christian can match. No Christian can equal the pathos of the lament of Catullus for his dead brother:

“Borne through many lands, and over these numberless oceans,
...I speak my futile words to mute ashes,

...And so for all time, my brother, hail—and goodbye.”

His love was more intense than any Christian’s could be because it had no hope; it was the stronger because it was known to be futile.

Now we cannot say that such love doesn’t exist, or that the atheist’s love is covert selfishness; the same charge could be leveled against the Christian, and with as little evidence. The atheist loves, but with the sort of love that the Christian cannot have and so finds it hard to understand, and is apt to rationalize into impossibility.

But by the same token, the Christian loves with a love that is different in kind, not degree, from that of the atheist, or non-Christian. Christians have all sorts of degrees of this love; but the kind of love they have is radically different from anything that the non-Christian possesses. The atheist, not having a love that is also a faith and a hope, cannot understand this kind of love, and he in his turn rationalizes Christian love into either delusion, masochism, or covert self-centeredness. Ayn Rand’s “altruist” is a beautiful example of the misunderstanding of what Christian love is. One of the problems of love of any kind is that negatively speaking it always shows up as humility; and so it always resists understanding even by the one who has it, and all the more so by the observer who does not.

But this does not mean that love cannot be accepted as a fact. And it is for the Christian to reveal this supra-rational fact in such a way that non-Christians are forced to accept it as a fact, are forced to see that Christian love is different from any other kind of love, and finally brought to realize that it is truer than the love that they possess, and truer than their own self-fulfillment.

But of course to be able to do this, the Christian has to understand something about the love that is distinctively his, and how it differs from other sorts of love. We can’t hope to fathom its mystery; but to give up and “just love” is silly. This, in fact, is one of the problems Christianity is having today. Tired of trying to understand things, Christians have thrown away their minds and started “thinking with their hearts,” and “just loving.” The result has been what one could

have expected: they have done things in the name of “love” that would have made the Corinthians blush, and certainly have made the atheists laugh instead of marvel. The fact that Christianity is trans-rational does not mean that we should abandon reason and sink below it; that is the Corinthian temptation; it means that we should use it, but rise above it.

Christians are called to love in their Prince, Jesus, who is the human expression of God’s love in the world. In one sense, we are called through Jesus; but in another, we are called to be Jesus—literally to be Jesus—because he is the man who loves with God’s love because he lives God’s life, and God is love; and those who live the life of grace are living God’s life and so are living the same life of Jesus; and therefore are the same Jesus. This is what Paul was driving at when he said in the First Letter to the Corinthians, “It is the same as in a body. The body is one thing, but it has many organs; and even though there is a multiplicity of organs, they are all only one body; and this is how it is with the Prince. When we were bathed in one spirit, we all were bathed into a single body...”

It is in this sense that there is only one mediator, because Jesus is not a mediator in the sense Mary or the saints are, but rather the mediation—or even, the medium—in which human beings live with the life of God. Jesus says in John’s Report, “[I pray] that they will be one thing, just as you are one thing in me and I am one thing in you; that they will be one thing in us, I in them and you in me.”

Mary and the saints are helpers we have in the total community, which is visible as well as invisible—just as we have friends on earth. But we *are* Jesus and Jesus is God, and so we *are* God; in that sense, he is mediator as no other is mediator.

So the first thing to note here about the Christian call is that it is not a call to be “another Christ.” There is only one Christ—one Prince—just as there is only one God. Your heart is not “another

you”; it is, in its reality, you, because you are a unit, not a system of things hitched together. So, you are not somebody who “stands for” Jesus, or who has Jesus “living inside” him; you are someone who lives with Jesus’ life; you are Jesus. You are just not all there is to Jesus, any more than your heart is all there is to you.

One of the things we have to be careful of with this analogy is to say that we are “parts” of Jesus the way an organ is a “part” of a body. This is true in a sense, but false in a sense. Paul did stress, using this analogy, that each of us has his own distinctive function in the supernatural life we live—so that not everyone is a “representative” (what we now call a Bishop), not everyone is a prophet, and so on.

But, though we make up the *body* which is the (social) presence of Jesus in the world today—the community is in this sense his body; and though each of us is a part of this body, which is literally the body, the physical body of Jesus (because it is matter which lives with his life, and matter is defined as “someone’s body” when it lives that someone’s life); still, this does not mean that we are “parts” in any sense of God, because God does not have any parts.

Christianity is not a version of pantheism. Jesus is God, and we are Jesus, and Jesus’ body, just as the branches *are* the vine, not something “attached” to it. And so we are God’s body. But, because we live with God’s life, and God is spirit, not body, we are not parts of God, but God Himself. There is only one God, YHWH, and that is who we are. We are YHWH as Son, not as Father, not as Spirit, but with the Father and the Spirit identical with us.

This is a great mystery. We are not one “with” God, except in the sense that the Logos (the Word) is “with” God; but “the Word was with God and the Word was God.” There is but one God, not three Gods, and if Jesus is one (thing) “with” God then Jesus *is* God; and if we are Jesus, we are God Almighty.

So we are not called to love God in the sense of knowing about someone and caring about him; we are called to be God. So the Christian call to love is not the call to love God; it is the call to be

God, who is love.

How could we answer such a call? Obviously, we cannot. We must not only be called, we must be chosen. The answer cannot come from us; it must be given to us. Only God can give his life to us; we cannot acquire it. How could finiteness acquire infinity—yet that is what we are called to.

St. Paul says in “Ephesians,” “This [every spiritual blessing in the heights of heaven] was what he gave us when he chose us in him before the world began to exist, so that we would be sacred and sinless before him in love; and when he had sonship to himself as his purpose for us from the beginning through Prince Jesus. ...the riches of his gift, which has also overflowed into us with complete wisdom and knowledge, because it has informed us of the secret of his will; that it was his pleasure, which he determined beforehand in the Prince, for things to work out so that when the time reached completion, everything in heaven and on earth would be brought together under one head in the Prince.

...[And I pray] that you will be strong enough to grasp, along with all the sacred people, what the length, width, and depth of the love of the Prince is, and to think the Thought that is too great to be thought—and so to be filled with the complete totality of God.”

You see, I am not making this up.

So Christian love is not so much love of God as it is God, who is love. The Prince, Jesus, is the human expression of God’s love in the world.

What this means, then, is that we are to love *as God loves, with God’s love*, and not to love *because* God loves, or because we love God. These may be phases, aspects, or conditions of Christian love; but the essence of Christian love is that it is God’s love, not any other kind of love.

“Your attitude is to be the one that was in Prince Jesus,” as I quoted from Paul to the Philippians. The essence of Christianity is

having God's mind, thinking God's thoughts, not thinking about God, or thinking about things because God thinks about them. But

“My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are my ways your ways,” says YHWH. “My thoughts are as far above your thoughts and my ways are as far from your ways as the sky is above the earth.”

As I said, Christianity is a new way of looking at things; and we must change our way of thinking about things, if we would change into Christians. To “love” is not what Christianity is all about; to be the embodiment of Love (with a capital L) is what it is about. It doesn't matter what you do, if you do it with this attitude; and if you don't, then it doesn't matter what you do either. In the first case, your act will be Christian, and in the second, it won't, no matter how good it is.

Let us be clear on this. It is possible to be good without being Christian. It is not possible to be saved except through the Prince and His community somehow; but that is a different story. Presumably, the sincerely good will be saved somehow, and so will somehow belong to the body which is Jesus; but their goodness, as Paul is at such pains to point out to the Galatians, Corinthians, and Romans, is not their salvation, nor can it do anything to save them. Christianity is not an ethic, a rule of conduct; virtue in the Christian sense is not something that you “do.”

To those who say that justification (virtue) comes by faith and not works, I would like to issue the warning that faith is not something that you “do” either. Some Sunday radio preachers exhort people to have faith and accept Jesus as their personal savior, as if this were something that they could do, and once they did it, Jesus would take over from there. But of course, that makes salvation depend on a “work” (the act of accepting Jesus as savior) and not “faith” in the sense Paul talks about it. Faith is a gift, not something that you “do.” You can do nothing, nothing, nothing, to be saved; it must be done to you; and even the acceptance of the gift is a gift.

Can you refuse it? Certainly. But your non-refusal is not your act. Even your refusal is helped by God—not that he makes you refuse, if you refuse. There is a mystery here, and we trivialize it if we make “predestination” into something that absolves us from responsibility, or make our freedom something that gets us out of the absolute control—in everything, including our choices—of God.

Christianity is a paradox, remember, not a dilemma to be resolved. We are absolutely powerless, absolutely, and must have God’s help even to sin; we are under the absolute dominion of God. But at the same time, our choices (caused by God) are free, and are our own, specified by us and not determined or made to be what they are by God.

However you want to describe this paradox, you falsify your faith if your “description” explains it in such a way that God makes us do things, or that God doesn’t have absolute control over our choices. We must hold onto both sides and affirm both sides. There is no contradiction between them; but to show how takes reams of paper. We know from faith *that* there is no contradiction; *how* they are reconcilable is something for the philosophers to ponder. We will have to get into this a bit; but it will be well to hold onto the facts and not to get lost in the explanation.

Notice here that this union with the Prince and so with YHWH is not really the love that the Christian has; if you will, the union is the condition for the love, because it is what the Christian is united *to* that is the love.

I make this distinction because we are inclined to think of love as union, or at least as for the sake of union; but this, I think, is a mistake, looking at love backwards. Love is unselfishness; but if union is its goal (that for the sake of which it happens), then again it is not unselfishness, but self-fulfillment—the self-fulfillment which consists in expanding the self by absorbing the other within it.

Now the lover does, in a sense, absorb the beloved within him; but

this is the *effect* of love, not its essence nor its purpose.

What I mean is this: If I make, say, my wife's happiness a goal of my actions (if I choose to act for her benefit and not mine), then this is an act of love. And what it means is that her reaching some goal of hers has become a goal of my act; for instance, if I help her type her Doctoral dissertation so that she can get her degree, then her getting the degree is the goal of my choice to act. Insofar as her getting the degree is not chosen as a means toward some self-fulfillment of mine (such as greater income for the family, and hence for me), then this act is love.

Now then, her fulfillment as an *independent* person is what I am after: I allow her to define for herself what the goal is, and then that goal *as hers and not mine* becomes the goal of my choice to act. But that means that her goal (always as an independent reality) is also a goal of *my* choice; and as a goal of my choice, it is the goal of an eternal act of mine, and is with me after I die; and so must be fulfilled if I am to achieve fulfillment.

That is, my fulfillment now depends on her fulfillment as an independent person, because I have made her goal one of my goals. I cannot be myself unless she is (in some respect) what she wants to be.

Therefore, because my goal is subordinated to her goal, her goal is my goal, and her fulfillment my fulfillment; and so she is "with" me as an independent entity but part of my fulfillment. Her happiness is "part" of my happiness; but it is precisely not subordinated to my happiness, nor is her independence lessened by being "part" of my eternal life.

What this means is that the union with God that occurs when a human being loves God is not a subordination of God to the person's own goals, or an absorption of God within oneself; and this union is not really even sought. The Christian loves God simply because God is God; God as he exists is a goal of the Christian's life—or, if you will,

God's "goals" are the Christian's goals, and God's happiness and "fulfillment" are the reason for the Christian's acting like a Christian.

Immediately, we run into another paradox. God, as absolutely perfect, has no real goals (things that he finds more fulfilling) and no real fulfillment, since he is absolutely "fulfilled" eternally and no further improvement is possible or even thinkable. Since God is absolutely successful and knows it—he is everything that even he could want to be, and knows it—then he is absolutely happy, and nothing can make him any happier or less happy.

Then how can God's goals be our goals, his fulfillment our fulfillment, his happiness our happiness? We can do nothing to "improve" God, to make him any happier than he might otherwise be; nor, since he is unchangeable, can we make him any less happy (by our sins, for example) than he might otherwise be.

Let us be clear on this; we will explore it in detail later. We have, most of us, been taught that our sins "pain" God or make him "angry" somehow; and some of that seems to be reinforced by texts from the Bible, which refer to the "wrath" of God. But if God is absolute and unchanging (as the Bible also teaches and has been held since the beginning of Christianity), then these terms cannot be taken literally. Our sins in no sense make God any less happy than he would be if we had not sinned; he is absolutely content with our sinning and even with our damning ourselves. If not, then it would mean that we would have eternal power over God, and could prevent God from "fulfilling" a goal of his (make him less than he would otherwise be) by sinning and suffering forever in hell.

No, we cannot in fact alter God at all. Then his happiness cannot be a goal of our acts in the sense in which another human being's happiness is the goal of our acts. That other human being has goals; God has none; he *is* goal; he *has* none.

The point to be made here based on this is that the Christian, loving God, is faced with another paradox: How can we love without doing something *for* our beloved? But we can do nothing at all for

God. The answer is that our love does not consist in “doing God favors,” or in “helping him fulfill his goals,” but in obedience: in doing what he wants.

But even this is a paradox, as we will see in the next chapter. God “wants” for me exactly what I want for myself—even if that is sin and damnation. If God has absolute power over me, then it is absolutely impossible for me to do anything except exactly what God wants me to do. Then no matter what I do—even if I try to be as disobedient as possible—I am obedient to God’s will for me. It is not possible for me to disobey; and hence, to say that love of God is “obedience to his will” is not enough.

Yet if we have the attitude that was in Prince Jesus, we must become obedient. Then what can this mean? It must mean that we *take on God’s way of thinking*. We are back where we were before. If I love God, I subordinate, not my actions, not my will, but my *mind* to him; the way he thinks becomes the way I think.

I am going to try to spell some of this out in general in the next chapter, particularly with respect to God’s attitude toward the evils that occur in this world—both the bad things that happen to people and the sins that they do. I will then try to spell out how taking over God’s way of thinking (i.e. loving as God loves) means one of three things: loving as the Father loves, loving as the Son loves, and loving as the Spirit loves; and these three dimensions of the Divine love, who are the three Persons of the Trinity, define the three states of the Christian life: the layman loves as the Father loves, the priest as the Son, and the Religious as the Spirit. (Since this is a work on lay spirituality, I am going to treat them in reverse order.)

But to finish this chapter, let me remark that the great Christian temptation is, instead of taking over God’s way of looking at things, to pretend that God has *our* way of looking at things.

For instance, since, when we love someone, that person’s

deliberately ruining his life causes us enormous anguish, we then conclude that God (a) will not let us ruin ourselves, even if we want to and (b) that if we do, we will cause him infinite sorrow. This is to make God into an infinitely affectionate puppy-dog, because this is the kind of “love” that animals have, and we love that way because we are (thinking) animals.

If we command someone to do something and he deliberately refuses, we are angry; and therefore, we assume that God gets angry with us when we sin. Knowing that sin is an offense against God (a kind of attempt to slap his face), we assume that he is offended by it.

If we love another person, we tend to have all kinds of fantasies of our own about what the other person’s “true happiness” is, and we proceed to try to make him happy by “helping him fulfill himself,” when in fact what we are trying to do is to make him over into our idea of what he is; and so we assume that God has some kind of “plan” for our lives that we must discover and fulfill if we are to do what he “wants.”

We want to be considered to be important, and therefore, knowing that God loves us, we assume that he loves us for what is worth while about us—weighing the good and the bad, he finds us more good than bad, and at least finds *something* lovable about us. Thus, we assume that God “loves the sinner and hates the sin”; but the sin defines the sinner, and if you hate the one you hate the other.

But in fact, God’s love is not affectionate at all; he is perfectly happy with us if we sin and even if we are eternally damned.

God is not angry with us at all when we sin, or offended if we disobey him.

God has no plan for our lives that we must discover and follow.

God knows we are not important, objectively, and there is nothing lovable about us. He loves us because he loves us, not because there is anything to love. He loves the sinner and is indifferent to the sin.

In short, loving as God loves involves a complete reversal of the

way we think.

Chapter 2

Loving as God Loves

God's independence from his world

We are in for some rather rugged going in this chapter, and it is as well to be prepared. I tried to show that Christian thinking, as taking over God's way of looking at things, isn't at all what our normal way of thinking is, nor is it, by and large, what we've been taught Christian thinking is. Chesterton said somewhere, "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried." I think I can add to this that Christianity has not even been found, because people are so interested in "trying" that they can't be bothered with figuring out how in fact God looks at things.

But consider this: the Founder of Christianity began his public statement of its essence by saying, "It is a good thing for people to be poor without resenting it; it is a good thing for people to suffer; it is a good thing for them not to stand up for their rights; it is a good thing for them to be oppressed because they are virtuous." And he ended his public life by expressing that essence in one sentence, "You are to love each other as I have loved you." This is the new commandment, not the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself; to love as he loves. And his love makes meaningful that it is a good thing to be poor and suffer and let people trample on your rights.

So let us try to consider how it is that God thinks of the world. What do we know about God's relation to the world?

First of all, we know that God is absolutely independent of the world; absolutely everything in the world, visible and invisible, depends on Him, and He depends on absolutely nothing in it.

We know that God, as YHWH, “He who is,” is the absolutely self-sufficient Being, who (to use St. Anselm’s term), as “that than which nothing greater is conceivable,” cannot be any greater, nor any less, the one in whom, as James says, “there is no change nor shadow of alteration.”

Hence, when God creates the world, this act of creating is, first of all, absolutely free on God’s part. There is no sense in which the world “fulfills” anything about him, or even the act of creating the world “fulfills” anything. He is not the kind of thing Plotinus thought he was: something “good” which of the necessity of its own nature must “diffuse” itself into finite copies of itself. That would mean that God, without these finite copies, would not be completely Himself (His nature as “diffusive” would be contradicted), and so he would depend on them. But we know from both faith and reason that if there is a God at all, He must be absolutely independent.

But does not God change by the very fact that before creating He was a God who didn’t produce a world, and afterward he had performed the act of creating? No. This misunderstands two things about God.

First of all, with God there is no before and after, because there is no change. God does not exist in time, and so does not do things in sequence. If the world as created by God evolves (and it does), with different things coming into existence in sequence, this implies no sequence in God, any more than the fact that you are reading the words on this page in sequence implies that the words either exist in sequence on the page or were even put there in sequence (They were put there by a machine that printed a photograph of the whole page, not by something like a typewriter that printed word by word).

Furthermore, the act of causing something is not affected by the fact that it has an effect. These words are on this page; if you read

them and have your life changed by them, this does not alter the words at all. They (it is to be hoped) changed you; but you did not change them.

Hence, when God creates the world, his “act” of creating is not a distinct act he performs; all it means is that His Divine Activity has an effect—which it does not need in any sense to have in order to be itself. God is independent, and free.

Nor does it follow that because God is good, then if he chooses to create, he “has” to create the best possible world—so that the evils that happen in this world have to be there, because otherwise the world as a whole would be worse off, and God’s goodness will not allow that. This is simply false.

Goodness and badness

The very first temptation of mankind was “to become like gods, knowing good and evil.” It is a temptation for two reasons: first, it is a lie, because God does not think in terms of good and evil; and secondly, thinking in terms of good and evil allows us to pretend that we are gods and put ourselves in the place of God.

If the Christian is really serious in trying to think as God thinks, the very first thing he has to face is the problem of evil in the world. It is not even a question of how God can *allow* bad things to happen (or bad things to happen to good people), but if absolutely everything depends on God’s actively producing it, how God can *cause* things which are bad.

There have been any number of “solutions” to this problem through the centuries, most of them inconsistent with the nature of God as free and independent, or the cause of everything finite.

For instance, there is the view that bad things happen as a punishment for sin. The *Book of Job* is actually a refutation of this theory. It supposes, taken in one way, that God is “angered” for our sins and visits damage on us to satisfy his wrath—which implies that

our sins can actually bother God, which in turn implies that we have some control over him, because we have done something that he didn't want done, and he is so miffed by it that he slaps us around.

But that implies that God depends on us and can be affected by us, which is impossible if He is infinite and our creator.

Another sense in which bad things as punishment can be taken is that God isn't actually angry, but that the sin, as a disruption of the Divinely established order, needs a punishment to restore the order. What this says is that two wrongs make a right. In this case, of course, Divine forgiveness would mean leaving the "disorder" intact, and would be inconsistent with a God who would inflict harm to restore it. Further, the harm (the punishment) is objectively a disorder, and it is hard to see how two disorders can establish order. That is, if I cut off a man's arm and get my own cut off as punishment for it (which sounds "fair,"), then how is "order" restored by having two maimed human beings instead of one?

Both of these senses of the "punishment" theory, of course, run up against the revelation in *Job*. Good people suffer. Suffering is *not* a punishment for sin. They run even harder against the Beatitudes: "It is good for people to suffer; it is good for them to be oppressed because they are virtuous."

No, you can't explain bad things happening in terms of a punishment for sin. Actually, the punishment for sin is nothing but the sin itself: as I said in the last chapter, the sin consists, not in "doing harm," but in setting up an impossible goal, and the "punishment" is the eternal striving for a goal that you know can't be reached. Bad things that *happen to* the sinner are no more a part of the sin's punishment than the bad things that happen to good people. This is what Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes, the "preacher") is saying in that book of the Old Testament.

Some try to explain bad things' happening by saying that if they didn't happen, things would actually be worse. God "allows" the bad things to happen so that greater good can come from them. But first

of all, God doesn't just "allow" these bad things to happen; he *causes* them. There was an earthquake in Mexico city shortly before I wrote these words, and thousands of people died horrible deaths, buried for days under rubble. In what conceivable way would these people have been worse off if they had not died in this way? Perhaps they would have been saved from hell. But in that case, how are the people in hell better off for being there? And what of the people—there must have been some—who, about to expire in agony under tons of debris, instead of repenting and praising God, cursed him, and damned themselves *because of* what happened to them?

After all, it would be easy for God to have a universe with no evil at all in it: simply create nothing. Then, with God alone in existence, everything is not only good, but infinitely good. It is *not* the case that God + a world is "better" than God alone, because God's goodness is infinite, and the finite world does not *add* to the goodness (it simply reflects it in an imperfect way). That is, when I teach my child that two and two are four, and he acquires that idea, there is not "more" of the idea that two and two are four, nor is there "more" of "two-and-two-are-fourness." So when God creates a good universe, the amount of goodness has not increased. Hence, if he were to choose not to create, there would be infinite goodness and no evil; from which it follows that the best way to achieve the "greater good" would be not to create anything. And certainly God knows this, if I can figure it out; and therefore we can conclude that the solution to why bad things happen is *not* "so that God can bring greater good from them."

So the "solution" to the problem of why bad things happen if God is good lies in the fact that *goodness and badness are human ways of looking at things*, and God does not look on things in that way. That is, it is a peculiarity of *our* way of knowing that there are "bad" things and "good" things at all; for God, nothing is either good or bad.

Hence, if we are to acquire God's way of looking at things, we

must get rid of thinking of things in terms of goodness and badness.

This is no small task. Let us consider why we think in terms of goodness and badness, and what these terms actually mean.

To make a long story as short as possible, we call something good when it agrees with our idea of the way it “ought” to be, and bad when it falls short of this idea, or somehow contradicts our expectations for it. For example, a good typewriter is one—let us say—that allows us to type at top speed and doesn’t jam; a bad one would be one whose keys stick.

The question is how we get this idea of how things “ought” to be. We must get it somehow from experience; but it can’t be simply from experience, or nothing would be bad. That is, the bad typewriter is a typewriter, and so it can’t be giving us the idea of “the perfect typewriter,” or we wouldn’t find it falling short of that idea.

The answer is basically this: we compare objects like typewriters and see what they have in common or what they are related to (in this case, to writing by tapping on the keys). We then “pull out” this common characteristic and consider it absolutely, without paying attention to individual differences; this is called “abstraction.” Thus, we have the abstract notion of the “purpose” or “function” of the typewriter.

Since this abstract notion has no limitations (because we have ignored them by abstracting), we then compare individual cases to this, which now functions as an *ideal*.

We can use this ideal in two ways: (a) comparing it with individual objects, we can discover whether things are typewriters or not (e.g. we might think that, say, a computer is a typewriter because it has a keyboard; but then we discover that it doesn’t print on paper what you write into it, and so we learn that our *idea* of this thing as a typewriter was *mistaken*).

Or (b) we can use the idea we formed as a kind of “standard” to which things have to “measure up.” For instance, instead of

considering ourselves to be mistaken in thinking of the computer as a typewriter, we can think of the *computer* as having something wrong with it because it doesn't print on paper—in which case, we call it a “bad typewriter.” It doesn't do what we expect a typewriter to do.

Notice that it is no accident that mistakes and “badness” are paired in this way. Both of them consist in comparing the world in front of us with our idea of it (our expectation as to what it is). If we use the *facts* as the standard to which the idea we have is supposed to agree, then we call the agreement “truth” (and say we have a true idea about things) and the disagreement “error” (and say we made a mistake). If we use the idea as the standard to which the facts are supposed to conform, then we call the agreement “good” (and say that the thing in question is a good thing) and the disagreement “bad.”

So badness is just a mistake looked at backwards. It isn't, of course, quite that simple. There is the kind of “badness” which involves an idea not based on facts, and one which involves an idea derived from facts.

The computer as a bad typewriter is an instance of the first kind of badness. A computer is not really supposed to function as a typewriter, and so the person's considering it as one is really a perverse distortion of reality. But this is different from considering as a bad typewriter a typewriter with a key that sticks. In this second case, you have reason to say that it is a typewriter, and that it is supposed to function in a certain way; but it doesn't.

Similarly, when we consider it bad to be blind, this badness has a basis in fact, because what do we have eyes for if not to see? It is our nature to be able to see; and so a person who can't see has an abnormally limited nature. But it would be perverse to consider it bad not to be able to play the piano like Peter Serkin, because there is no reason to expect anyone but a supremely gifted pianist to be able to do this.

But even in the legitimate case, we derive the idea of what “the

nature” is from a comparison of many cases; and then we set a “lowest point” of limitation below which we consider the individual abnormal, and say there is something wrong with it.

But there is nothing really in the nature of the thing which says it *can't* be limited below what we consider “normal” (because obviously many individuals are limited to this great degree); and so the “lowest limit” below which badness occurs is always arbitrarily put, and is relative to *us*, not actually “out there” in reality.

Let me give an analogy. When does heat change into cold? There is no such quality as “cold,” actually; heat is molecular motion, which, above 273 degrees below zero Celsius, is always occurring. So at zero degrees Celsius (the freezing point of water, 32 degrees Fahrenheit), there is plenty of heat present. But it's cold when there's so little heat that water freezes.

That means that “cold” is a term like “bad.” “Cold” is *relative to us*. As far as we are concerned, heat has changed into its opposite at the freezing point of water. This is not objectively true; but it is true relative to our comfort. Notice that Mr. Fahrenheit put his zero 32 degrees lower than this; so for him and his followers, heat doesn't “change into its opposite” until we get a good deal less of it. That shows that the zero-point is arbitrary, even when it has a basis in fact—because it is a relative zero, not an absolute one.

Similarly, “badness” always is relative to the way we consider things. Things can have any limitation right down to the level at which they don't exist. Human life can last 120 years, 90 years, 20 years, one day, five minutes, a half a second. All of these are possible limitations on the length of life. We consider it bad for a life to last less than, say, 50 years; but there is nothing in the nature of life that says it *has* to last that long. The “badness” is relative to the way we consider things.

Similarly, we consider it bad to have any of the sensations called “pain.” This is because it is of the nature of pain to let us know (in general) that something destructive of the organism is happening to

it—as when you feel pain at being burned. If you couldn't feel pain, then, you could have a hand burned off without realizing it; so in that sense, pain is useful, and is not in itself bad.

And in itself, it's simply a sensation. The first taste a person has of liquor is distinctly unpleasant (“painful” in that general sense), because the organism is warning the person that this stuff is poison; and the sensation of getting drunk (“intoxication” means “being poisoned”), the dizziness, upset stomach, etc., is hardly what a person would spontaneously consider pleasant. But our society has defined the taste of liquor to be the kind of thing that a “sophisticated palate” finds pleasant, and the sensation of getting intoxicated as “really having a good time.” We have defined what is in our natural state a pain as a pleasure, and, precisely because it is a rather violent sensation, we consider it a great pleasure, and proceed to poison ourselves eagerly.

So not even pleasure and pain are objective. They are simply sensations, and whether they are called “pleasures” or “pains” depends in large measure on whether the culture regards the acts as “good” or “bad.” We will never solve the alcoholism problem in this country until we as a society define the sensation of getting drunk not as “evil” or “sinful” but as “unpleasant” or “disgusting.” (In our perversity, if we define something as “pleasant but evil” the “evil” turns out to be an added incentive to perform it—because we are proving that “evil” is just a term that the fanatics use and has no basis in fact; which, of course, is to some extent true.)

Now then, the opposite of “bad” is “good.” Something is “good” when it lives up to our preconceived idea of it. The philosophers hold that everything real is good; and what they mean is this: If we have an accurate idea of something, then clearly, (since our idea agrees then with the reality), the reality agrees with the idea—and so the reality is good. That is, if you see a blind man—who is, to be sure, abnormally limited—but you consider him as he is, and not as if he “ought” not

to be this limited, then you are considering him as not having something wrong with him; or in other words, you consider him as something good. He is good, but abnormally limited.

I am not trying to say that there is anything *wrong* with considering a blind man as having something wrong with him and trying to correct his blindness—because in fact, blindness is an abnormal limitation, and sometimes it can be corrected. But you don't *have* to look on it this way. And especially if it can't be corrected, then looking on it as something that “ought not to be” rather than as a limitation only leads to frustration. That is, the blind person can't do a lot of things that sighted people can do. But if he focuses on what he *can't* do as if he “ought” (because he is human) to be able to do them, then he is worse off than the blind person who focuses on the things he *can* do as an individual and refuses to look on himself as “a member of a class” and a defective one at that.

In this connection, Jesus' story of the workers in the vineyard is instructive. Some worked all day for a normal day's wage; others worked less, down to a single hour, and got the same wage. The workers who worked all day complained, and the owner of the vineyard said, “What are you complaining about? You got a day's wage for a day's work. How does what I do to these other people affect you?” The injustice comes, in their minds, not because they were looking at themselves and their work and its pay (which was a fair wage), but because they were considering themselves *in relation to* the others, in which case a fair wage became unfair. This comparison with others, Jesus says, is not the Christian attitude.

How God looks at things

But this brings up how we move from the human way of looking at things (however legitimate it might be) to the divine way, the

Christian way, of looking at things.

God's knowledge of things is not and cannot be by way of making comparisons and generalizing, because this way of knowing is based on the knower's being affected by the object, while God's knowledge is creative: God's knowing a thing to be a certain way *causes* it to be as He knows it.

It follows from this that *God has no ideals: God knows a thing to be as it actually exists*. Remember, an ideal is a way something "ought" to be (whether it is that way or not). But as an ideal and the way something "ought" to be, the idea is the "real truth" about the thing. Thus, when we consider ourselves as the saints we "ought" to be (the sinless selves we could have been), we take this ideal to be our "real" self and our actual reality as falling short of what we "truly are."

But if God considered the saint I could be as my "real" self, then I would be that saint. Could God have a notion of the "real" George Blair that is unreal? Or if he thought that I "ought" to be that saint, then (since his knowledge is creative and there is nothing to prevent him from doing what he knows "ought" to be done), then I would be that saint.

But doesn't he have that idea, and can't create the saint without making me not free?

No, this won't work. It is a device by which we persist in trying to impose on God our way of thinking; but it contradicts God. If God thought of the saint I could have been as what I "ought" to be, and if I am not that saint, then I have power over God. I can affect him by making his creature something that he would prefer wasn't made, and thwarting him somehow.

That is, either "ought" is meaningless here, or if God thinks I "ought" to be that saint, then God's idea of what I really, truly am is falsified by my perverse behavior, and I have affected God. But this is impossible; he is totally free and independent of me. *There is no sense in which God would "prefer" me to be the saint I could have been if I had not sinned.*

Hence, the notion of the “permissive will of God,” that God *allows* bad things to happen, but doesn’t really *want* them to happen, contradicts God’s nature, and is an attempt to make God think human thoughts, knowing good and evil. It is the succumbing to the serpent’s temptation.

God’s “plan” and what actually happens

But this means that God has no plan for my life. Precisely. He has no “plan” for my life in the sense that he has some *idea* of what I “ought” to do that is at all different from what I actually do, or which I can discover beforehand and “try to follow.” God’s “plan” for my life is absolutely identical with his knowledge of my life; and his knowledge of my life is his knowledge of the actual life I live, based on my own free choices, which in his providence, he causes to occur as free and as dependent on me. It is impossible for me *not* to follow God’s “plan” for me, because his eternal knowledge of my life is just exactly whatever I do, not some blueprint of what I “ought” to do.

The Christian must get this straight. God’s “plan” is no more something he “would like us to follow” than our knowledge of what a person is doing is a “plan” this person ought to be following. In both cases, it is simply knowing what the facts are. God’s knowledge of anything *exactly corresponds* to what the facts are, because God’s knowledge is *always* true—not because God can’t make a mistake, but because his knowledge causes the fact to be what it is.

To put this another way, the usual interpretation of God’s “plan” for us is that he knows what is “good” for our lives, whether we follow this or not. But goodness, as I tried to show, is a *human* way of knowing; it is meaningless when applied to God. God does not think in terms of “goodness” or “badness”; and so for God there can be no “falling short” of his “plan.”

To put it still another way, what happens is God’s will for the world; but there is no distinction between God’s will for the world

and what God *wants* or *would like* for the world. He *actively wants* to happen what actually happens, because it is his will that it happen that causes it to happen as it happens.

I stress again that his *causing* something to happen as it happens does not *force* it to happen that way. He causes it to happen *as it happens*; and this is in dependence upon the causes *in this world*—such that, if they had been different, what happens would have been different. For instance, if I had decided to read during the period I am writing this instead of what I actually decided to do, the words would not at this moment be going on my computer’s screen, and in all probability the words that you would be reading would be different from what they really are. God causes me to be writing now *as this act exists*; and it exists *as determined by my decision*.

There is a mystery here, which we must not gloss over. My choice is mine and free, but it is also caused (as a finite act) by God; and he has control over it in the sense that if he were not to cause it, it couldn’t occur (because it would then contradict itself, and contradictions can’t happen). So the choice depends both on me and on God; but it is *specified* by me.

God’s will and his law

But then what of God’s law? Didn’t he say, “Thou shalt not kill” and so on? And doesn’t it mean that in some sense he doesn’t want these acts to be done by people? Then can he actively *will* people to kill and command them not to and send them to hell if they do?

Yes, he can.

What the Commandments of the Law are, fundamentally, are ways of spelling out what actions are inconsistent with the nature of the agent. We are, whether we like it or not, creatures, totally dependent in our reality and our every act upon God. If we refuse to acknowledge this dependence (if we refuse to worship God—the God on whom we actually depend), then we are saying, in effect, that we

don't depend on him, and wanting not to depend on him. But we do depend on him, whether we want to or not.

Therefore, we must not (a) worship anything else, or (b) refuse to worship God. And this is the gist of the Commandments that deal with him.

Also we are children of our parents, and we owe our existence in this world to them. To show disrespect to them is to act as if we didn't depend on them, when in fact we do.

And so on. The Commandments, as St. Paul pointed out in the letter to the Romans, simply spell out what acts are self-contradictory, in case we don't realize it. But what they as commandments mean is this: "If you want to do this sort of thing, know that it carries with it eternal frustration." In one sense, it's a command, because the eternal frustration is a kind of punishment; but in another sense, it isn't, because the frustration is what it means to do something that can't be done, and the eternity of the frustration is connected with the fact that a choice is of itself an eternal act.

So the commandments do not express God's will for us, except in this sense: He created us with the genetic limits we have; and we try to exceed these limits at the expense of eternal frustration. But this does not mean that he doesn't *want* us to try, if we want to. He *warns* us of the consequences of the act; but if we want to do it and face the consequences, then (a) he isn't "angry" or "offended," and (b) he does not "allow" us to do it, but causes us to do it (in the sense above). In this sense, God simply does not care whether we sin and violate his law or not.

And this is why St. Paul in the Letter to the Galatians says that there is no law any more—including the moral law. The Law was simply provisional, according to Paul, to take care of the time between the giving of the Promise to Abraham's "descendant" and the appearance of that descendant, the Prince, Jesus. And, as Paul points out in that letter, we are not "descendants" of Abraham (daughters and sons), we are "the descendant," singular, the heir of the promise; we

are the Prince. God is no longer a Master of whom we are slaves; God is our Father, and we are free.

He hastens to point out in the letters to the Corinthians and Romans that this does not mean that we can *do* with impunity what the law forbids. It is still true that if you choose to do something self-contradictory, you bring frustration down on yourself.

But the motivation for the Christian is different. The Christian is not interested in consequences for himself; and so, “if you do this, you will suffer” has no motivating force for him. But as a Christian, he loves and has respect for God’s creation; and so, knowing himself to be the Prince’s body, he will not “make the Prince into a libertine.” He doesn’t do this because there’s a law against it, but because it’s not consistent with what he is. God doesn’t care whether he sins or not; and as a Christian he knows this; but still the sin is an inconsistency and damaging to the sinner, and he who loves does not do damage.

And this, of course, is why love fulfills the law while still being totally free of it as a law. You just don’t want to do what the law forbids; even if it allowed it, you still wouldn’t want to do it.

The point here, however, is that God’s Commandments are not an indication that God’s “real will” for the world is different from what actually happens, and that by sinning we can frustrate that will, and do something that God merely permits. No, when we sin, God wills that the sin occur just as we will it; and God is infinitely happy with that sin. It brings our damnation in its train, of course, and we know it; but God is infinitely happy with that damnation.

This is a hard saying, and few there are who will entertain it for even a moment. But if it isn’t seriously faced, then we can’t hope to do more than impose on God what we would like him to be, and not get our idea of God from what we know him to be.

But then if God is infinitely happy with our sins and damnation, why did he become man and die for us?

Loving as God loves

The answer is not really the standard one that a sin against an infinite God is an infinite offense and demands infinite satisfaction; and therefore God, the Infinite, became man and died to provide that satisfaction. Granted the “offense,” objectively has the dimension of being against an infinite God; but he is such that he does not need any “satisfaction.” There is a sense in which this can be understood correctly, I suppose; but that sense drains the “satisfaction” of most of its meaning.

The real point is that once a person sins, the choice cannot, short of a miracle, be erased as an operative act in his eternal life; and consequently, eternal frustration is inescapable.

But the human being, because of original sin, does not have himself under full control, and so is not totally wrapped up in his sin, as I mentioned earlier; and therefore *it is possible* by a miracle to erase the choice and still leave the person intact—if the “erasure” is done while we still are bodies and can change.

But why would God do this? For the same reason he would create. Because he can. Not because he would “feel better,” or gain in any way. Not because he “feels sorry” for us or “feels” anything at all. Simply because he can.

This is love. To do something which benefits another when there is absolutely no self-reference in it at all. That is how God loves us.

And so the horrible death of Jesus was not because our sins are so horrible that they demanded it. Jesus himself saw that the death was not necessary, when he prayed God not to let it happen.

But then if it wasn’t necessary, why did it happen? First of all, it happened because the people chose it to happen. Jesus, by not answering during his trial at the Sanhedrin, gave the council an opportunity not to find him guilty, since there were not the required two witnesses to give the same testimony against him. But when Caiphas asked him, “Are you the Prince, the Son of God?” then this was a command issued by one who had authority over him as a Jew; and so he was required to answer truthfully, with an answer he knew

they would take as blasphemy, and make him guilty of death.

But then, before Pilate, Jesus also made a reply (“My kingdom is not one in this world”) which gave Pilate a chance to free him (“Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to what I say”); but which Pilate chose to ignore—at which point, Jesus again said nothing in his defense.

So it was not the will of *God* that Jesus was submitting to; it was the will of *men*; and *because* it was the will of men, it was the will of God.

But the second reason why it happened was the one Jesus gave at the Last Supper: “No one has greater love than this: to give up his life for the one he loves.” That is, the crucifixion and its horror was to demonstrate graphically the *love* of God, not the demands of the justice of God. In this sense, what Jesus was illustrating was (a) that there was no self-interest whatsoever in his saving us from our sins; and, paradoxically enough (b) that God doesn’t care what our sins are.

That is, the death of Jesus was so horrible that a person looking at it has two choices: “Is my sin really that ghastly that it would demand a punishment like this to atone for it?” or “Is the love of God that great that he would undergo this for my little peccadillos?” Since few of us are really more than fools when we sin, a realistic assessment would incline toward the second choice—which is the real one.

Some spiritual writers use the first alternative as evidence that our sins are actually much greater than we think they are, using that notion of “infinite offense” I mentioned earlier. But Jesus never hinted that God’s wrath was such that he had to die to satisfy it; but he did explicitly state that he died to show what his love for us was. And objectively, all any sin is is an attempt to do what cannot be done; it is just deliberate foolishness, and is laughable, not shocking. It is a temptation to regard sin as “great” and “terrible” and “evil” and so on, because it makes us think that we have power when in fact the essence of sin is powerlessness.

Jesus died, among other things, to free us from the grip of original

sin; and a good part of the grip of original sin is precisely looking on things in terms of good and evil; we think in a Manichean way of the world as a war of good against the powers of evil, and we hope that the powers of good will prevail.

But the fact is that evil has no power; evil is impotence masquerading as power; it is nothingness masquerading as something. Jesus overcame evil because he made it possible for us to change our way of looking at things, not because there was something to overcome. If you look at a doughnut, you can see the hole; but the hole is nothing at all, not something that is “opposed” to the doughnut; it is the absence of doughnut, and nothing more.

Similarly evil, even sin, is not anything at all; it is the hole in our intentions. The *act* we do is not evil, even when we kill someone, as can be shown by the fact that it is not evil to kill a person in self-defense. The *harm* done by an evil choice is not “really bad,” as can be seen from the fact that we sometimes *have* to do something from which harm results *in order* not to sin—as when, for instance, the Christians refused to worship idols and eat consecrated food, even though this unleashed the persecution which saw thousands of them fed to lions. This is not to say that this harm is *good*, any more than killing a person in self-defense is a *good* act. “Good” doesn’t really apply to such things, except in that watered-down sense of “well, it isn’t *bad*.”

And that is the point, of course. “Good” and “bad” are ways we look at things; and Christianity can free us from this. As God looks at things, our sins are not “bad,” and so do not demand “satisfaction,” let alone the enormous satisfaction that is entailed in the death of Jesus.

I should interject here that, in keeping with the Christian paradox, we will have to come back to good and evil because Jesus is human as well as divine and therefore thinks in human as well as divine fashion. But we don’t have much trouble with the human way of thinking, so let’s stay with the divine one for the moment.

So far, then, we have learned from the Divine way of considering things, that the Redemption shows that God loves the world absolutely unselfishly, that our sins don't really matter to God, and that evil has no power whatever.

But what of Paul's statement, "This is God's will: your rescue," if in fact he doesn't care about our sins and the damnation they bring? Again, why did he bother to redeem us?

This is the second point about the way God loves. He wills our rescue, not in the sense that he wills that each of us in fact escape hell, because (presumably) some of us won't take advantage of the rescue offered, and will damn ourselves. He "wills our rescue" in the sense that *he wills that our rescue be available* if we want to use it. We cannot rescue ourselves, once we have sinned; but rescue from our sins is not a contradiction, and is miraculously possible by an intervention of God into the world. He then intervenes to make possible what is impossible without this intervention.

He wills the salvation of each of us *insofar as each of us wills it*; that is, salvation is not withheld from anyone; but God doesn't *want* those who damn themselves to be saved. he doesn't "will their rescue" in that sense or they wouldn't be damned. That's the "permissive will of God" rearing its ugly head again. If we want to ignore the rescue available to us and be damned, that's perfectly all right with God.

In that sense, I suppose that Jesus would have died for our rescue even if no one had ever availed himself or it and been saved from his sins. Jesus died, not to make us saved, but to give us the chance; if we take the chance, fine; if we don't, fine.

What this means, then, is that God's love is not indifference. An indifferent God doesn't care whether we sin or not, and won't do anything either to help us not sin or to save us from the consequences of our sin. A *loving* God, apparently, will give us the help we need and want, and will save us from the consequences of our acts insofar as this is not absolutely impossible (as it is with the angels, who can't be redeemed); but he has no "stake" in this—it doesn't matter to him

whether we take advantage of the opportunities he offers us.

Notice that when we do things to help others, we resent it when they reject our help and continue to do themselves damage; and we resent it most especially when they condemn us for “interfering” when all we were trying to do was help them—as if we got anything out of it. But this is not loving as God loves. If we loved as God loves, we would offer help; but if it wasn’t wanted, this wouldn’t bother us. And we wouldn’t keep trying to force it on the person we were trying to help, either; it would be there, in case he changed his mind, but if he didn’t, then that would be fine with us. And this in spite of our knowledge that the person was doing something really damaging to himself.

Notice that “doing something damaging” is another way of saying “doing something bad”; and this in turn is another way of saying “doing something that contradicts *my idea* of the way he ought to be.” When you help a person “overcome his fault” or “stop doing what is damaging to him,” then you are imposing *your* idea of what is “good” for him on him; you are saying that you know what his “real true” self is, and that he is falling short of it. You are taking your *idea* as “objective fact” and ignoring *his* idea of his “real” self as a “delusion.”

But *neither* idea of the “real true” self is objective; both are subjective. His idea is the goal of his life; and even if it is self-contradictory, it must ultimately prevail, because he is self-determining. The point is that *there is no objective meaning* to “what is good for him.” So when you “help” him with this attitude, you violate his self-determination in the name of what is “good” for him.

But Jesus’ death for our sins was not this way. Jesus did not die to *persuade* us to be converted; he died to make conversion *possible*. And this is the third point about the way God loves: *God’s love for his creatures is an infinite respect for their reality.*

God manipulates inanimate objects and things that are living but

have no choice; he *provides opportunities and information* for those that have choice. He gives us the Commandments so that we can know what to avoid in order not to be at cross-purposes with ourselves; he gives us the Crucifixion so that we can erase those choices that we have perversely made and avoid their eternal consequences; he gives us the Church and the sacraments so that we can live this new life more easily (if we choose) and integrate it with our natural lives. But he does this *in perfect consistency with what we are as self-determining*.

Even when God manipulates the inanimate and animate world so that it evolves into what it is today, he only manipulates the chance element built into its laws, so that the laws of nature are left intact, while nature itself (because of the manipulation of these chance events) is lifted beyond its own unaided capabilities, and inanimate nature, essentially inferior to life, generates the conditions of life and is lifted into life, and vegetative life is lifted into sentient life, and sentient life is lifted into the spiritual life of the intellectual body, man; and then man is lifted into the Divine life itself—but always leaving the nature intact.

It follows that the Christian, who loves as God loves, has God's respect for the reality that exists. He who looks on things as "bad" does not respect the reality in front of him. You can't look on things as "bad" without comparing the reality unfavorably with your idea of it: what it "ought" to be, according to you. This is not respect for what is; it is contempt for reality. This is the most important reason why the Christian, in taking over God's attitude, has to give up "good" and "evil."

This is not to say that the Christian ignores the potentials things have. A person who loves as God loves knows the reality before him, and can see what powers it has to develop. Hence, he can, like his Master, provide the opportunities for it to develop according to its capacities. This is very different from "correcting what is wrong."

Let us take an alcoholic as an example. The human way of loving

an alcoholic is to see how he is ruining his life, and to help him—even to force him, if need be—to get out of this trap he has got himself into. The Christian does not consider the alcoholism and the degradation and all the rest of it as bad. He sees the person as he is, not in relation to what he could be if he were not an alcoholic. His respect for the alcoholic means that no matter what the alcoholic does, even if he continues and gets worse and worse, does not matter to the Christian; it cannot make him love the alcoholic less, or distress him more. He will accept the alcoholic absolutely.

But he is there if the alcoholic wants help. If he wants to talk, the Christian supplies ears. If he wants support, the Christian encourages him. If he *wants* advice, the Christian gives it to him, if he knows it. The Christian studies the alcoholic, to find out what step he could take to be happier—either with his problem or to get rid of it. The Christian is willing to face the possibility that the alcoholic might never recover, and the other possibility that, all things considered, it may not be better to get rid of the problem. Force will be applied only to the extent that the alcoholic is not free, and that it might actually work.

It isn't that the Christian will *do* anything that the person who knows how to treat alcoholism wouldn't do; it's that his *attitude* toward the alcoholic is different. He respects the alcoholic infinitely; it isn't that he "loves" him in that condescending sense; it isn't that he considers the alcoholic, even in his degraded state, as the "equal" of himself; it is that he has a reverence for him *because* he is, simply because he is. He does not consider him as "fallen," is perhaps the way to put it; he looks on him as *being*.

The fourth thing to learn from the crucifixion about the way God loves us is that Jesus' life ended with the crucifixion, without even one of his Apostles (his Representatives, who were to carry on his teaching) having the faintest idea of what his teaching was. His whole life was to teach us the meaning of God's love; and only Mary loved

in this way; but she was taught earlier, before ever he was born.

His whole life was a failure, in other words.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta, when asked how she felt in trying to help the poor and sick in India, when there were so many that her efforts amounted to nothing, said, “God didn’t ask us to succeed; he only asked us to try.”

And, especially since the “trying” is the attempt to affect people’s minds and hearts, and people are free, the attempt is often doomed to failure.

And what this means is that God’s love for the world *does not have a goal*. There is not something that God “wants the world to achieve.” God does not have a purpose in this sense. The “purpose” God has for creation is, as I mentioned *that it exist*, not that it work toward some goal he has set for it.

And thus, God’s love does not think in terms of success and failure. Jesus died to provide the chance for us to think the Divine thought; and people nowadays are turning Christianity into a plan for achieving a just economy. There is nothing wrong with a just economy; but this is a human goal, and it is completely beside the point of what Jesus died for. Jesus, as the *Book of Revelation* points out, is a failure throughout the whole of history; and his failure is his success. That is, “failure” does not have meaning in the Christian context; because Divine love imposes no purpose on the beloved; it is beyond purpose.

Purpose is rational, but divine love is trans-rational. It can support purposes; but itself is not purposive. If Jesus had as his *purpose* in this goal-sense the salvation of the world, then he failed, because not all are saved. But if he had as his “purpose” simply what he did: providing the opportunity for salvation, then he succeeded; but in this sense, the “purpose” is the act itself, not a goal to be achieved by it. God has, in this sense, “his glory” as his purpose in creation; but this is not a goal; it is simply that the creature is the glory of God, no matter what it does.

The trouble with this analogous sense of “purpose” is that we tend

to interpret it as if it were a goal to be achieved, and this again apparently gives us a power over God, allowing us to “thwart his will” and “make him angry” and the rest of it. It is the serpent’s temptation again, to which so many—even of good will—succumb. We have no power over God; none, none, none. Even the crucifixion of Jesus did not mean that we had any power over him, “Don’t you realize that I could ask my Father and he would send me twelve legions of angels?”

So where are we? If we are to be Christian, what we have to do is think and love the way God thinks and loves. To think the way God thinks means that we don’t consider ourselves or our concerns as objectively important; that we don’t think in terms of “good” and “bad”; to love as God loves means that we are not affected by what we do for others, that we provide opportunities for the benefit of others without having a personal stake in whether they avail themselves of them or not; that we have infinite respect for the reality we are working on, seeing it as it is and deferring to its reality, rather than imposing our idea of what it “really is” or “ought to be” on it; and that we are not concerned with the success or failure of what we do for the world.

An attitude like this is not humanly possible. A human being either considers himself to be important, or he “forgets himself” for a cause, which then takes over the role of supreme importance for him. But God, the Word, did not consider himself as being important, (“When he was in the form of God did not consider being equal to God something to be held onto”), nor did he consider his mission and its success to be important, because he knew it would end in failure, in spite of his ability to make it succeed. Nothing is important, objectively; nothing is important for one who thinks as God thinks.

But the person who considers nothing as important is either the one severely depressed, who does nothing, or the one who is frivolous and will do anything. The Christian does what is good and avoids what is evil, not because it is important, not because it matters, but

simply because. Because he can. Because he loves as God loves, and God does things because he can.

Life as fun

Notice that when a person plays a game, he takes the game very seriously while he is playing it, but he recognizes that the game has no real point. The purpose of basketball is to put the ball through the hoop more often than the opposition, following the rules of dribbling, passing, and so on—rules invented to make it difficult to put the ball through the hoop.

There are all kinds of purposes and rules in basketball, in other words, but the whole thing is just a game; the purposes are just there to make it interesting to play it.

God's attitude toward the world and life is analogous to this. He creates, not because he has any purpose for the world—though the world is evolving toward a purpose—but because he can. The world, for God, is utterly and completely superfluous; it simply does not matter toward his happiness, fulfillment, or in any way for him. It is a pure game.

And so for the Christian, life is a game. It isn't serious; it doesn't have a special purpose that has to be achieved. It is enough that it is. It has purposes, to be sure, and it has rules; and the Christian acts for the purposes and follows the rules. But the rules don't ultimately govern him, and the purposes are there to make the game interesting. But he plays the game for the sake of the playing, not for the sake of the winning.

Giving up "good" and "bad," in other words, and adopting God's attitude, makes life fun. Only the Christian can consistently consider life to be fun.

"Have fun in the Master all the time," says St. Paul to the Philippians. "I say it again: have fun."

Loving as Jesus loves

Now Jesus, as a person, is God; but he is also really a human being; and consequently, he has *both* a divine and a human love. So, since we are his body, we do not love solely with God's love, but also in a human way; and part of our task as Christians is to reconcile these two types of love.

It would, in fact, be immoral in some circumstances for us to love purely in a divine way, in which anything that happens simply is, and is not either good or bad. God can look with complacency on a child dying of starvation, and consider this as a special limited kind of life; and in God's case doing nothing about the child's starvation is not immoral, because the child is the total creature of God and has no rights against God.

But if I had food and a way to keep the child from starving to death, and I "refused to look on things in terms of badness," and watched the child starve to death, I would be contradicting myself *as a human being*, because I would be violating the *right* the child has against me to the food he needs to live. That is, my refusal to feed him would be tantamount to killing him; and it is inconsistent with a human being (who has the right to life) to kill another, as the fifth Commandment says.

Evil, remember, is not a *false* way of considering things; it is merely a *relative* way of looking at things; but it can be true. When it's cold, it's not false to say that it's cold, even though there's no positive quality called "coldness," and coldness is relative to our discomfort from too little heat. But the small amount of heat *does in fact* cause us discomfort; and so even though coldness is relative, it's there.

So evil does exist from the human point of view. The starving child cannot be "allowed to die" if we can legitimately prevent it, or we have violated our own natures and damned ourselves. If we do this, and the child dies, then this does not bother God; and if in the process we damn ourselves, this does not bother God either. But this

does not mean that it isn't bad to let the child die or to sin and damn ourselves. It isn't "absolutely" or "objectively" bad; but it's bad, relative to being a human being.

Hence, we cannot abandon the human point of view and simply adopt God's; a Christian is not a Buddhist, whose love does not involve himself in this world with actions and purposes—because we are, as Christians, the *human* expression of God's love in the world.

Therefore, Christians will be humanists. Our love will include goodness and badness; we will try not to connive in badness, and we will try to improve things.

But as Christians, we will recognize that these badnesses we don't cooperate with are not something absolute; and if we can't in practice do anything about them, we won't worry about them. Twenty million innocent children have been pulled apart limb from limb at the order of their own mothers in our country in the last ten years or so. This is a horror surpassing that of Hitler many times over.

The Christian will certainly not cooperate with such a thing—either by having an abortion, or advising anyone to have an abortion, or by not speaking out against abortions when occasion offers; but if people still choose abortions, and more and more babies get killed so brutally, he will not be devastated by this. God is running the universe; he expects us to do what we can. Objectively, this is not an evil which must at all costs not exist.

The Christian attitude, then, does not ignore the evils in the world, or think them away because they are not objective or absolute; this would be to adopt a purely divine point of view, and would make us Buddhists, not Christians. But by the same token, the Christian does not take the purely human point of view, and get so wrapped up in "causes" and "fighting injustice" and "righting wrongs" and so on that he acts as if these evils were something objective and absolute, and considers anyone who is not totally committed to their eradication as guilty of the sin of omission.

The Christian cannot consistently be a fanatic, in other words.

There are right-to-lifers who consider that if you don't devote enormous amounts of time and energy to the fight against abortion, you "don't care" about the dismemberment of these children, and you are on the "other side," at least in sympathy, the way we used to consider as a "Pinko" anyone who had any concern for social justice. This fanaticism is a legitimate *human* point of view; in fact, secular humanism, when it recognizes evil, cannot not adopt such a view if it is to be consistent with itself. If there is evil, and if it is great evil, like that of Hitler, then not to fight it is to cooperate with it. How can you sit back and let people be tortured to death?

But the Christian has the divine as well as the human point of view; as long as he is not *actively* cooperating with evil, then he is not guilty of it; and his omissions are not always tantamount to active cooperation. A person who denounces abortions need not also picket abortion clinics. Not that it is not good to do so; but not doing so is not immoral.

But the Christian recognizes that the evil in abortion lies, not in the fact that children die this soon and in this way, but in the fact that people choose to kill them; and even this choice, insofar as it is an ignorant choice, is not evil. Many abortions are done by doctors who think that this is the best thing to do and see nothing wrong with it, for women who think that not to have an abortion is positively evil. These are mistakes, not sins. It is a question of education, not "stopping the carnage," really.

And there are many right-to-lifers also who resort to propaganda, not education—who refuse to consider the issue and offer as "arguments" emotionally compelling but fallacious "reasons" that lead most effectively to their conclusion; because "the killing must be stopped," and the fact that they are cheating people by false arguments to accept the true conclusion is unimportant. The true arguments are less convincing than the sight of dismembered bodies; and the right-to-life fanatic will not use the true ones because of their lack of effectiveness. The goal is the overriding thing: the evil must be

eradicated, and if we have to do “little evils” like stretching the truth in order to achieve the goal, so be it.

The Christian cannot be *that* goal-oriented; because, adopting also the divine point of view, he *respects the reality* he is dealing with. If you would change people’s minds, then you change them by presenting the facts, even if there are more effective ways of doing this which are somewhat dishonest. If your means do not work, then it is not “objectively essential” for the goal to be achieved. You will fail; but you will fail because you love the world as God loves it.

Catholic institutions who pay their workers less than a living wage are also examples of the human point of view that “works for God,” but has abandoned the divine way of looking at things. “Yes,” they say,” but if we pay a decent wage, we will have to close down the school, and how will the children be educated?” *Must* the children be educated? In the eternal scheme of things, it does not matter. If you can’t educate the kids except at the expense of the educators, then you have to leave the goal in God’s hands and close down. Even if the educators are willing to be exploited? Probably even then. The issue is not simple.

The point here is that the Christian has to *study* the reality and can’t be simply goal-oriented or simply complacent; he can’t ignore evil when ignoring in it is conniving with it; but he can’t become so obsessed with it that he is willing to do evil “to prevent the greater evil.” Between these extremes, there is often a great deal of leeway. What does the Christian do?

Taking the divine point of view, he recognizes that there is no “objectively best” course of action; but taking the human point of view, there are goals that can be achieved. So he studies himself and what he is dealing with and asks, “What are the potentials in myself and in this corner of the world?” and “What is the act that is most likely in practice to help things develop a bit toward their fulfillment—and the act that I as a person am most suited to do?”

It may be that the act the Christian sees as the one he can perform

which brings about the greatest advance in his sphere of influence is an act that involves nothing positive in the fight against abortion. The Christian then leaves this to others. He will not cooperate with abortions, and will not speak in favor of them; but he does not “have to get involved” against them. He can be happy doing what he is doing, without guilt. “The Master loves a cheerful giver,” says St. Paul. Not that we have to give and then grit our teeth and pretend to be cheerful; it is that our giving doesn’t have to be what causes us pain.

Christianity has always been regarded as simple but hard: all you do is love, but loving causes agony. Actually, it is easy but complicated. Loving as Jesus loves means acting with, not against, your nature (because, as we will see, your nature naturally “takes you out of yourself”); but figuring out what act is the act that actually does some good, that actually helps the world and doesn’t impose some abstract goal on it, is very complicated. It’s much easier to have a goal, and simply ride roughshod over reality to achieve the goal; but this doesn’t show any respect for reality, let alone an infinite one.

Jesus’ love and the Beatitudes

Does this sort of love I have been describing make sense out of the Beatitudes?

Let us consider them: “It is good (i.e. it is a blessing) for people to be poor and not resent it, because then they belong under heaven’s rule; it is good for people to suffer, because they will find solace; it is good for people not to stand up for their rights, because they will inherit the promised land; it is good for people to be hungry and thirsty for virtue, because they will be satisfied; it is good for people to be sympathetic to others, because sympathy will be shown them; it is good for people to have clean hearts, because they will see God; it is good for people to make peace, because they will be called God’s children; it is good for people to be oppressed for their virtue, because

they belong under heaven's rule.”

The reason, of course, why all these things are good for people is the same: being under God's rule, or the spiritual and eternal life that Jesus talked about. Jesus is not saying that poverty, oppression, having your rights trampled on, suffering, yielding to aggression (which in practice is how you can make peace when faced with it), and so on are *good* in themselves or *desirable*. We don't have to *want* to be poor or to suffer. The point is that those who are poor or suffering or not assertive and who have people walk over them and oppress them *are in a position* to see things in the Christian way: that they themselves do not matter; that what happens in this life is not objectively important.

And the other commands in the Sermon on the Mount are consistent with this: if someone takes your coat, give him your shirt; do not resist aggression; don't do good where your actions can be seen (even though your light is to shine in front of others); don't hate your enemies. What is important here is not *actions*, but *attitude*. In fact, some of the actions Jesus advises us by way of hyperbole to take are immoral; you can't morally pluck out your eye or cut off your hand.

All of it makes sense, however, if what he is saying is that we are not to look on ourselves and our own goals and concerns as “objectively important,” and are to consider the situation and act in accordance with the whole reality, of which we are simply one component that is to be taken into account. This is the divine-human way of looking at things.

Jesus' love and obedience

There is another facet that we have not stressed to loving as Jesus loves. St. Paul said, “You are to have the attitude that was in Prince Jesus, who, when he possessed God's form did not consider being equal to God as something he had to keep hold of; he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, and turned himself into what was

the same as a human being; and once he found himself in human shape, he lowered himself so far as to submit obediently to death, and death on a cross.”

The characteristic of the crucifixion was that it was an act of obedience; it was obedience, as I mentioned earlier, to God’s will because it was obedience to the human wills of those who had human authority over Jesus—in spite of the fact that their acts were mistaken. “Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing.”

The Jews condemned Jesus because they regarded him as a blasphemer. He did claim to be God Almighty, and it is blasphemy for a mere human to claim to be God. The only trouble was that Jesus’ claim happened to be true. They did not know what they were doing.

Jesus refused to say, “But they *ought* to have known, and therefore I will not submit to them.” He submitted, because they had authority over him.

And this is the “fruit” by which a person will be known as Christian: Does he submit to those who have authority over him?

Those who claim a “higher inspiration” which frees them from obedience to legitimate authority regard their own goals as overriding mundane considerations such as doing what the ignorant fools of this world tell you to do. They know what “God’s will” for them is, because they have a hot-line to the Holy Spirit, and they know that the Holy Spirit is telling them this must be done because God wills it to be done.

But this contradicts everything I have said about God’s will. God does not have a will that says, “this must be done come what may.” God’s will respects his creation absolutely; and if authority forbids something, it is not “God’s will” that authority be flouted, because it is that same God who has given authority its power, as St. Paul also points out—and so did Jesus, when he said to Pilate, “You would have no power over me at all if it were not given you from above.” And this to a hated Roman dictator.

No, the Catholic who “knows better” than the Pope, who takes

“Vatican II” as the criterion of all judgments and ignores Vatican I or the Council of Trent, is the Catholic who thinks in human terms and imposes his ideas on God, rather than the one who shifts his way of thinking to accommodate God’s way into his human thoughts, and so to become Jesus.

How do you “discern” whether the Holy Spirit is inspiring you or whether the spirit which inspires you is your own human mind, or even the unholy spirit? If you are inspired to disobey, it is not the Holy Spirit.

This is not to say that you have to wait for authority to command before you can act. The Holy Spirit does dwell within you, and can prompt actions from within as well as from without. But he does not contradict himself; and if he forbids from without, he does not prompt from within.

So the sign of the Christian is obedience, because he does not consider that he and his goals matter, objectively.

Self-love and love of self

This lack of mattering objectively, however, does not mean that the Christian, like the fanatic, ignores himself. He is not important to himself, true. The fanatic is not important to himself, because his “cause” is of such importance to him that his own reality is totally subordinated to it. He will run himself ragged, destroy his health, and so on, if it promotes the cause.

But the self is a creature too; and the Christian has God’s attitude toward himself, just as he has God’s attitude toward everything else. He has infinite respect for himself; he loves himself with God’s love for him. He does not love himself with self-love, which is an assumption that he is “objectively important,” but he accepts himself absolutely.

This is a hard saying. Those full of self-love usually hate themselves, in reality. Why? Because they fall short of what they could have been.

All of us are perverse; all of us are rotten. We can either forget about our rottenness and cultivate a “healthy sense of self-importance,” or we can face the facts about ourselves. If we care about what we are, facing the actual facts can be devastating.

But this is the opposite pole from accepting ourselves as God accepts us. I talked earlier about the Christian’s acceptance of someone who is an alcoholic; how it means not looking on the person as “fallen” and trying to make him live up to his “better self,” but accepting him as he is, absolutely. Suppose now you are the alcoholic yourself. Should you have any different an attitude toward yourself?

The answer is clearly no, if you are not of any special importance in the divine scheme of things—as you aren’t. The alcoholic is trapped; he is willing to face the fact that he is trapped into degradation; and insofar as he is a Christian, this does not matter to him. He does what he can reasonably do to get out of the trap, to take whatever is the step he can take; but when he falls down carrying this cross, even for the second and third time, he does not curse himself for a bad cross-carrier and feel guilt. He picks himself up (if he can) and goes on (if he can), not knowing whether he will ever get out of his trap, or whether he will die before he gets to the hill where he will be nailed to the cross. If someone takes the cross off his back and carries it for him, he does not feel guilty because it’s *his* cross and the burden has been placed on others; it is simply not important how well he bears his burden and what harm it is causing him and others; he accepts the situation and acts according to the reality, not according to some ideal.

It is much easier to accept others than to accept oneself. It is much easier to love others than to love oneself. But the Christian loves himself. He respects not only his “soul” but his body too; he does not become so engrossed in “charity” that he has no charity for himself and destroys himself in the process.

This is not to say that it is always wrong to wear yourself out for others. Just as killing another in self-defense is not wrong, because the

death is not chosen; so there are times when the harm to the self can be ignored because of the greater good that comes to others. But the point is that the Christian will take himself into account also; he will take himself into account just as he takes everyone and everything else into account; and if the act he performs happens to benefit himself more than anyone else, he will not refuse to perform that act out of some notion of “altruism.”

In that sense, the Christian, the absolute altruist, is the opposite of the “altruist” that Ayn Rand and Friedrich Nietzsche castigate. The Christian is by no means *against* himself or a *hater* of himself, or even an *ignorer* of himself. He simply does not consider himself as in a special position in God’s universe; he is no more and no less deserving of respect than anyone else. The Randian and Nietzschean egoist, however, is in an essentially false position. That person considers himself to be the most important person, the goal of his actions; but this is *only* from his own point of view, and not from anyone else’s—which are equally legitimate points of view. Thus, Rand’s philosophy is *not* “objectivism,” as she claims it to be; it is radical *subjectivism*. The subject acting, being faithful to all of its aspects (including respect for others’ rights) is the goal and the only reason for acting: “to thine own self be true.” But this is true only from this person’s point of view; from everyone else’s point of view, this person’s fulfillment is irrelevant. So the subjectivity is objectivized; but it has not escaped subjectivity. It can’t, if the self is the end.

But the Christian can act for his own fulfillment, because, loving himself as God does, he has infinite respect for himself. Why not act for his fulfillment? Not that it is objectively important, not that “God has given me these talents and it would be sinful to waste them,” as if the talents were God’s goal to be achieved; but just why not? Again, true love of self is trans-rational, not rational. It supports reason, but it is beyond it.

And since a human being is self-determining, then when he sets non-self-contradictory goals for himself and his world, these goals will

be fulfilled eternally. So the Christian, who loves himself with Jesus' love, not only fulfills himself and his world here, he does so eternally. He has a hundred times as much in this life and life eternal. The best of both worlds.

Here is the Christian paradox with a vengeance. Because he does not matter to himself, the Christian will develop himself with greater zeal than the secular humanist or egoist—because he has infinite respect for himself, and he knows that his goals do not depend on chance, but on his choices here and now. And he will develop his world, because he knows that God has no goal for this world beyond the goals that we humans have for it; but that our eternal environment will be just exactly what we choose it to be—no more and no less.

Confident of ultimately achieving his goals, the Christian can face reality as the non-Christian cannot; the Christian has absolutely nothing to worry about. Reverses, oppressions, evils, simply do not matter. Not even the goals matter, objectively. It is all a game; but it is an interesting game; it is a beautiful game.

And this, of course, is the Christian witness. Life is not serious, but it is beautiful. With all the horror in the world, life is beautiful. The Christian can live this out; no one else can, because no one else integrates both the divine and the human way of looking at things.

Chapter 3

The Lay Vocation

God's love and prayer

God's love, then, has no "plan" for our lives, or no preconceived notion of our "true reality"; and so there is no sense in which we can disappoint him or make him unhappy. But, as we saw, this does not mean indifference to us, because he will in fact give us the opportunities for advancement and happiness, so that if we want to take them, they will be there for us.

Does this mean, however, that we should just launch out totally on our own, and we can never pray, "Thy will be done," or ask God what his will for us is?

No. This is another one of the Christian paradoxes. God's plan for my life is my life; but this does not mean that he does not know my potentials better than I do, and so know better than I what would lead to my enjoying life to the full. I may *think* I know what will make me happy; but God *knows* what will make me happy; and the two might or might not be the same.

God's respect for my reality is such that if I pursue what I think will make me happy, then he will not interfere to inform me that I am actually on the wrong track unless I want this interference; and if I persist, knowing that I am on the wrong track, to pursue as my happiness what I know will only lead to unhappiness, he will not interfere. This is, of course immorality: to define as happiness one's own misery; and hell is the "fulfillment" of this self-contradictory

condition—getting the unhappiness you defined as “my goal in life; my happiness.”

But God’s love and respect is not indifference. If I want my happiness, and am willing to give up what I *think* will make me happy for what really will make me happy, then he will not leave me to the mercy of my own ignorance and folly. Hence, if I pray to my Master for a given thing, with the proviso that “if this isn’t really what will make me happier, then please give me what will make me happier,” the Master might not answer the prayer with what I asked for, but with what I *would have* asked for had I known as much as he does.

Now, in giving me what I ask for and/or what will make me happy, God also respects the reality of the rest of his creation. Thus, I cannot expect to receive what might make me happy at someone else’s (or something else’s) expense; such a request, involving harm to another, is self-contradictory and immoral. If my desire to be a great philosopher, for instance, meant that what I wanted was to be regarded as the world’s greatest thinker, so that Immanuel Kant would be despised; then this envy of another’s greatness means that I want things to be different from the way they are (because Kant is a great philosopher, and not despicable); and so what I want would be a contradiction—or in other words, frustration. And God’s respect for me means that I would get what I really wanted in this case.

The danger in prayer, you see, is that you get what you want. You don’t necessarily get what you ask for either way; but you get what was implicit in what you asked for.

The God we believe in does intervene in this world. He respects his world and respects it infinitely; but this does not mean that he leaves it alone. Even the world beneath us needs his help as it evolves beyond itself; and he intervenes gently to give it this help. He intervenes to help us too; but since we can choose, he helps us only to the extent that we want to be helped.

Prayer, of course, is a recognition that we cannot do anything on our own; that God has to cause our every act. Prayer is the act by

which we acknowledge our absolute dependence on God.

Ordinarily when we talk of prayer, we refer to the prayer of petition: asking for something from God. But there is also the prayer of adoration, in which we simply recognize the relationship of absolute dependence we have upon God; there is the prayer of thanksgiving, by which we acknowledge that what happens to us is in fact due to God's causality and is the result of his love for us; there is the prayer of contrition, by which we acknowledge that we have made a mess of our lives, and we would now like him to perform the miracle of making us that different person who does not have self-contradictory goals.

Not all prayers are explicit, however; in a sense, the goal of prayer is for the person to be so aware of God and his dependence on God that God is always present to his consciousness in some sense—more or less as our hands are always present to us; not necessarily always adverted to, but always at least on the outskirts, as it were, of our consciousness. When this stage is reached, everything a person does is a prayer.

One thing that prayer is not: manipulation of God. The pagans used to “propitiate” the gods and try to get them to do what they wanted; and there are many radio preachers who, in effect, seem to be saying the same thing. Norman Vincent Peale, for instance, talks as though God and Jesus are a power in you by which you can do amazing things—which is true, in a sense; but which is not the point. *God is not to be used*; we depend on God, who loves us; he does not depend on us. Since he loves us, we will achieve our goals; but this does not mean we have “power,” still less power over him. We are absolutely powerless, absolutely.

My problem with this sort of thing is not exactly what is said; it is the question of attitude. The “Let Jesus work in you to solve your problems and bring you joy” school is saying that what Christianity is about is that Jesus and God are “relevant” for our happiness; they are means we use to achieve our goals fully. But God is not the means: he

is the end, for the Christian. The Christian is *not interested in his own fulfillment*, still less willing to use God as a tool to achieve it—even if God is willing to be so used.

St. Paul said this in his first letter to Timothy: “This is what happens to people who have destroyed their minds and turned away from the truth; they think religion ought to be ‘useful.’ Religion is, of course, very useful—when you aren’t looking for benefits in this life.” So you see I am not making this up.

And in fact this attitude (which I think is anti-Christian) works against itself, for the reason I was outlining earlier in this section. If you start praying to God and “using the dynamism of the ruler of the universe” to achieve your goals, then you will be using God to give you what you think will make you happy; and he will give you this, even if it does not make you happy—and it won’t, unfortunately, because you are perverting the ordination of creator and creature.

It is still true that to be Christian, you have to give up yourself, your fulfillment, your goals, your happiness. If you do this, you will get fulfillment, happiness, and the rest of it; but you can’t give it up *for this reason*, because that contradicts itself; you have to give yourself up absolutely. You must not matter to yourself.

The function of prayer, then, is not a vehicle by which you can manipulate God into giving you what you want; it is an acknowledgement that you are not important and only God matters. So, as Jesus said, we shouldn’t worry what we pray for; God already knows what we need. Not that we shouldn’t pray for them, so that we recognize that they come from God: “Give us our share today of the bread you rain down on us; release us from our debt to you if we release those in debt to us; and do not bring trouble down upon us; keep us from harm,” as Jesus told us to pray. But we don’t need to make a speech about it, as he told his Representatives just before he gave this example of prayer; you can’t “persuade” God to do anything for you.

Then why does he tell us to persist and insist in prayer? Not

because God will finally relent, like the dishonest judge with the widow pestering him; but because it takes a long time for us, often, to get out of the goal-seeking mentality of manipulating God and praying in self-forgetfulness, where “Thy will be done” does not mean “Thy will be my will.” His will for us *is* our will for us; but it is this self-will which we must give up to be Christian. What we mean is not “give me what I want and make me happy with it,” but “let me be happy with what will really make me happy, not with what I would like to have make me happy.” In *that* sense we want God’s will rather than ours; and this is what prayer is to do for us. This takes perseverance.

Sanctity

I will try to say more about how the layman can pray later on; but let this suffice for the relationship between God’s love, his independence, and our prayers.

I now want to reveal a great secret. If you want to be holy, then of course you know that you cannot do this for yourself; God must do it for you. Christian holiness does not consist in moral virtue, but in absolute self-forgetfulness and in a taking over of Jesus’ attitude toward things. Your goal, if you want to be holy, is not to matter to yourself at all, and to love everyone and everything—including yourself—as Jesus does.

If you pray for this, sincerely, wanting to want this—you are not capable even of wanting it sincerely—then I warn you that God will give it to you. You will come more and more not to matter to yourself; and that God is will come more and more to be the only thing that makes any difference.

And the way God will take you away from self-interest will be this: he will take away from you absolutely everything that you think will make you happy—and will replace it with what really will make you happy.

He will not do this all at once; if he did it all at once, you would not be able to stand it. Nor will he do it against your will. As your life goes on, you will come to a crossroads where it will seem to you that the more reasonable thing is to give up something that you think will make you happy; if you choose to give it up—even if you don't think you will be able to carry out the choice, then God will take it from you, sometimes only to give it back; sometimes to replace it with something you couldn't have imagined would make you happy, but which you later discover is much more enjoyable than if you had kept whatever you had reason to say you should let go of.

Sometimes, of course, God takes, and takes violently. We get into automobile accidents, even through no fault of our own, and are blinded and maimed; we go in for a routine checkup and discover that we have cancer. Part of this is due to the fact that God respects the causes in this world; but the rest of it is God showing his love for us.

His love? His love. If you are to give up yourself, you must give up yourself. We can't do this by ourselves; our self must be taken away from us. If you are serious about loving God, then these horrible things make it more possible for you not to hold on to yourself.

What then are we asking if we want to be saints? For nothing. St. John of the Cross was called "Doctor Nada," "Doctor Nothing," because that was the burden of his teaching—and he was one of the great mystics of all time. If you are to matter to yourself not at all, then you are to be left with nothing, nothing nothing.

But don't be afraid; it will be taken away from you in such a way that, though it will be fearful to give it up, when it happens it will not matter. And once it is given up it will be seen to be a blessing. Blindness a blessing? It depends on your attitude. Cancer a blessing? It depends on your attitude. There is no such thing, objectively, as evil; whether something is good or bad depends on what you compare it to; it depends on your attitude.

The whole point of God's training of the Christian is the acquisition of the new attitude.

And God will not hold you to a commitment you didn't know you were making; if you want to back out, and you say, "I'm sorry, Master; I don't really want any more to be a great saint and give up my whole self; I'm content with minimal holiness," then he will respect this too. Christianity is not just for the great saint; it is for the mediocre ones also.

You can stop anywhere along the way, if you want to; it does not matter to God. He will not be disappointed in you if you give up along the road to great holiness; he does not need great saints. He will make you a great saint if you want him to; but he will merely save you if you want that—or he will damn you if that is what you want. It is all up to you, and don't think you have failed, somehow, if you change your mind.

But if you want great holiness, then there is much in store for you. First of all, it takes an enormous amount of time. Anyone can be a "great saint" for two weeks; but this is actions, not attitude. The true great saint is always a failure, and he knows it—no one knows it more vividly than he does. But as time goes on it does not matter to him how rotten he is, how miserably he does God's will, how often he fails in even being a decent human being, let alone a virtuous one. What does it matter? Increasingly, as time goes on, the person on the road to great sanctity sees that there is nothing in life for him; that only the fact that Christianity is true makes life bearable.

And then—and then even the conviction of the truth of Christianity will be taken away. All consolation in the presence of God will wither; because consolation is self-gratification in the awareness of the truth of the faith and the presence of God. "My God, my God, why have you left me alone?" cried Jesus on the cross. Yes, even the faith will seem to be taken away, and we will be left with nothing. Nothing.

Then why go on? Why does a person at that stage act as if the faith is true, when he doesn't even know that it is any more? Because there is nothing else to do. Everything else is ashes, and is known to be

ashes; all that used to be desirable in it has been burned out.

Actually, at this stage, God is much closer to the person than he has ever been. God, as absolute reality, cannot be known directly by concepts (which, as forms of existence, are limitations of reality). Direct knowledge of him is a knowledge that cannot be formulated in words; it is analogous to our knowledge of being awake while we are awake. Our wakefulness is not a part of the *contents* of our consciousness, but our awareness of the act itself of awareness; similarly, the mystic's knowledge of God (because this is what we are talking about) is a knowledge that is there but does not seem to be there because it is unlike anything else; it is wakefulness to the truth.

So the person who is being led to self-forgetfulness is being filled with—not the knowledge *of* God but—divine knowledge. And it shows up in the person in a “taste” for the truth. He can recognize the truth when he sees it and can spot something that is falsity masquerading as truth. Why? Because Truth itself is in his mind; and Truth knows itself. The person is beginning to be able to think the Divine Thought, to be God while staying himself; and this Thought does not reason, but simply knows things as they are, and accepts them as they are.

But it seems, to the person's conceptualizing mind, that he does not know what the depths of his mind knows with blinding clarity—and that is the point; on this subject, conceptual knowledge is blinded by the fact that the person is becoming the Truth; he does not have to “find out about” it any more than a person has to reason whether he is awake or dreaming. And like a person who tries to reason and prove to himself that he is awake, the more he tries, the more confused he gets, and the more obscure the obvious seems.

The last thing we have to give up, in other words, is our own minds. We not only have to give up thinking of things from the human point of view, we have to give up human thinking.

This is not to say that, having been given up, these things will not be given back or will not remain with us. Some of the great

philosophers were mystics; and their reasonings are still outstanding today. St. Thomas, one of the greatest of these, is said to have said on his deathbed, “It is all straw.” And of course, it is; it simply is not important.

It is not necessary to want to be a saint, still less to want to be a great one. But you can. You have a terrible future ahead of you if you do; but it is a magnificent one. Not that it matters.

And, of course, in relating all these horrors, I have been only stressing half of the paradox; God will take everything away from you; but he will replace it with a hundred times as much *here, in this life*, in addition to giving you eternal life: making you God Almighty.

If you want to be a saint—and I pray that you do—you must make a leap in the dark of faith. You don’t know what your future will be like, except that, from your present vantage point, it will be both horrible and magnificent. Not that it matters.

From then on, what you do is do what seems most reasonable for you to do, based on as clear an assessment of the realities of the situation as you can. If you do this, then “everything works out for good for those who love God.” You can’t make a mistake; because, trying to do what God wants, which is your real happiness, even your mistakes will be the best thing you could have done.

You see, this is not the best of all possible worlds for those who will have their way no matter where their real happiness lies. God respects the world infinitely, and will not maneuver things so that people become happier than they want to be, or become happy in spite of themselves.

But for those who want to love God, who have given up their very selves for his sake, there is nothing hindering him from making them as happy as their limited reality will allow, as well as raising them beyond all limit and making them the same Being as Himself. For these—for “those who love God”—this is the best of all possible worlds. For the others, the world is that in which they get what they

want; even if what they want is their sorrow.

The three states of life

Loving God, then, is, in the real world in which Redemption has taken place, what life in its absolute fullness is all about. But, as I have said so often, loving God is not simply having God as the object whom we love; it is taking upon ourselves (or rather, being willing to receive) the very love God has—or better yet, the love who is God Himself.

But God is a Trinity, and therefore the love who is God is also triune: one, but having three names. And I mentioned at the outset that the three Christian states of life give emphasis to one or the other of these modes, if you will, of God's love, while not repudiating or denying the others. It is time to spell out what this means.

Essentially, the layman takes over the Father's way of loving, the priest the Son's, and the Religious the Spirit's. Now the Father is the Creator, and thus His love in the Trinity is that of the originator, and for the world is the creative love for the whole universe; the Son is the Redeemer, and thus His love in the Trinity is that of the expressing of the Father's love (as the Word), and for the world is the redemptive love for those who are (actually or potentially) chosen to share in the Divine life; and the Spirit is the sustainer (the *paracletos* or "support"), and His love in the Trinity is that of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father, and in the world is the indwelling of God in His creation.

All this, obviously, is extremely mysterious; but let us look at what it means in terms of what human life is like when it expresses each of these kinds of Divine love. We will approach the matter backwards, as it were, because I want to end with the lay life, the least understood, by comparison with the other ways of loving, since more has been written about them through the ages.

The Religious, then, is the human being who expresses in his life primarily the love of God the Spirit: that reciprocal love in which God loves the world and the world loves God. He is thus the primary vehicle by which God can demonstrate the “length and width and depth” of his love for human beings, while at the same time, he is the representative, as it were, of the created universe expressing its true relation (which is love) to the Creator and Redeemer.

The Religious, therefore, is essentially the contemplative, the mystic. His state of life is one in which everything is subordinated to the facilitation of the emptying of oneself of everything connected with self-fulfillment so that God can be in him “the totality of the One who sums up everything and is in everything.” The Religious not only tries to allow God to love him to the limit, but also is the one whose whole life is summed up in love *for* God.

“But,” you say, “not all Religious are shut up in monasteries and convents contemplating God; there are active orders too.” That is, of course true, just as it is true that there are priestly and lay mystics. It must be stressed again and again that *every* Christian life is a mixture of the three “pure” states, because God is a Trinity, not a committee of three. I am speaking of the Religious state as a “pure” state, showing what is essential to it as Religious. But there are Religious orders that have a redemptive mission to others, and orders that engage in scientific research and so on. These are Religious orders because the *emphasis* is not on the action, but upon the *mystical dimension* of the attitude toward the action. They are Religious orders because of the way they look on what they are doing; and they are primarily Religious if the orientation is that all is directed toward God as the goal.

This is really what is distinctive about the Religious state as distinguished from the other two states of the Christian life: God is the goal. In the other states, God is the starting-point, and the world (either the created universe or the people in it) is the goal. The priest or layman does not use the world or the people in it as a *vehicle* for

loving God, but loves the things and people of this world *with God's love*. The Religious is the one who sees the world and everything and everyone in it *in its relation to God*.

And that is why it is the Religious who is the representative of the world loving God. He is the one who makes explicit this dimension of the relation between God and the world; he, as mystic, is the voice by which the world utters its praise of its Creator and Redeemer, because it is his eyes which are the eyes of the world seeing itself as created by God and redeemed by God and it is his heart which is the heart which is the world's heart bursting with gratitude and joy because of what God is and what God has done for it.

Again, there is nothing wrong with priests or laymen joining in this rejoicing and expressing their gratitude to God for all that he has done for us. This is just the priests and laymen taking over the Religious dimension of the Christian life, which is "proper," as it were, to the Religious state as such, but which *must* be in all states of life because God's love is triune. It is just that the Religious life is the life which is the sacrament, as it were—the visible sign—of this particular way in which the love of God expresses itself in human life.

The witness of the Religious to the non-Christian is this: He has nothing himself, and shows himself to the world as having nothing; he has no worldly possessions, he has no worldly partner, he has no worldly will of his own. He has, as it were, no "personality" of his own which he holds on to: he is, by obedience, a pure "member" of his order, and his will is not his, but that of God through the Superior's slightest wish. His very appearance is not to be distinctively his; recent Popes have stressed the notion of the Religious "habit," the uniform, which is part of what they are as a "sign" to the world. The sign is that the individual has disappeared as something distinctive.

But of course, the Christian paradox is that the Religious as such, the contemplative, in this disappearance, "owns nothing but possesses everything," has the whole of the human race as his partner in love,

and does exactly what he wants—because he has chosen to want what his superior wants.

And the sign to the world is that fun the Religious has as completely free, that enjoyment of life which the non-Christian cannot understand but which he sees and which forces itself upon him as so evident. The non-Christian sees the monastery and the convent as a place of escape from responsibility; and yet he sees the monk and nun as responsible individuals, in control in their relinquishing of control, not escapists, absolute realists, not pie-in-the-sky idealists, in their “flight” from the world taking the world’s cares on their shoulders and offering up these cares to God, who is running the universe. “How can they give up all this and be so happy?” is what he asks; and this leads to “How can it make sense to give up all this?” That is their witness. Their “martyrdom” (which is the Greek word for “witness”) is their resurrection. They emerge as individuals because of their individual, free expression of their taking in of the world and expressing its love for God.

The Religious, therefore, is the expression of the Theological virtue of charity: love. This is the virtue that expresses the life of the Spirit in the world.

The priest is the one who takes over the attitude of the Son: the redemptive love of God *for* the world. Thus, while God for the Religious is the Omega, God for the priest is the Alpha, and the world—that is, those to be redeemed—is the goal.

The way the priest looks at things is that he sees what a treasure the Faith is, and what a shame it is that this marvelous gift is not understood and shared by everyone.

Again, we are all “organs” of the one Priest who is the only real Priest (in the sense of the one who offers sacrifice) in Christianity; and so we all not only share but *must* share in the Son’s attitude, the priestly attitude, in order to be Christian at all. The Faith is given to each Christian in part to be shared with others, not to be buried in his

own soul, because faith is love, just as hope is love.

But we are again speaking of the “pure” state, the sacrament, now, not of love precisely (that is the Religious state), but of *hope*. The Spirit is love, the Son is hope, the Father is faith, if you want to connect the Theological virtues to the Persons of the Trinity; but faith, hope and love are one. Note that faith and hope occur, as Paul remarks, in this world; and love is the virtue that carries over as such into the next. You can’t have hope where there is fulfillment, and you can’t have faith when you see. Thus, the priestly and the lay state are states that deal with this world as their locus and goal; they transcend this world, because they are God’s attitude toward it, but they are aimed at the “transformation of the world to God,” as St. Paul says.

Because, then, the priest (in the sense of the ministerial priesthood) is the visible sign of the virtue of hope and the Redemption, he is, of course, the one to whom the Sacraments (in the strict sense now, the Seven) are entrusted.

The person who is the human expression of this aspect of the love of God is, of course, the Bishop, who is the Representative or Emissary of Jesus (that is the meaning of the Greek word *apostolos*) in his diocese. He is not the representative of the Pope; *each* Bishop is the person who is taking over Jesus function as Prince of Redemption in his own diocese; but he does so *only in union with all the other Representatives*. Since they each and all have no function except to represent Jesus Himself as Prince of Redemption, how could they be at odds with each other? Thus, the “college” of Bishops is the Representative, and at the same time each Bishop is the Representative—and to the extent that he is at odds with the College of Bishops, he represents himself and *not* Jesus.

Now the Bishop *delegates* some of his functions as Representative of the Prince as Redeemer to the priests. They are not Representatives of the Prince in their parishes, but representatives of the *Bishop*, who is Representative of Jesus, the Redeemer.

Now the attitude that the Bishop takes is that he has no *mind* of

his own. The Religious has no *will* of his own; the Bishop has no mind of his own. His mind is to be purely and simply “the mind that was in Jesus the Prince.” His function is not to command, but to preserve and transmit. True, he commands his priests; *but he does not command, really, his laity, his “flock.”* He shows them the way; he reveals the Truth that Jesus taught, preserving it from error; he provides the Sacraments for their ease in living the Divine life; and he can, if they refuse to accept the Truth as it actually exists, exclude them from communion with the Believers—because in truth they are not in union-with the believers in the Truth. Does this damn them, this anathema? No; their own conscience is their judge; it simply says that what they are advocating by their statements or their life is not the objective truth, and is not to be followed by people who want to hold to the objective truth.

Thus, though the Sacrament of Change of Mind (now called that of Reconciliation, what used to be called “penance”) makes the Bishop (and by delegation, the priest) into a judge, *its function is forgiveness, and it cannot condemn.* Even when the priest refuses absolution, he cannot send anyone to hell; that is for the person and God alone. His refusal of absolution (which is not to be done lightly, if ever) means that “*I cannot, in the name of Jesus, remove this sin from you, because it seems to me that you still want it.*” Jesus Himself cannot “forgive” a sin that the person still wants, because, as I said earlier, from God’s point of view there is nothing to forgive; it is simply the erasure of what is repudiated by the person. Thus, the Bishop or the priest is not really *judging* the person in this Sacrament, but offering *renewed* hope to those Baptized (who by this bath were washed of their previous sins) who have sinned and so fallen from the life and the hope they once had.

Why is the Bishopric and the ministry of the Sacraments not open to women? First let me say something about the fact that it isn’t. Part, at least, and to me the most clear part, of the Scriptural foundation for this is in Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 14, in contrast

with what was said about women's keeping their heads covered in Chapter 11. There, when all is said and done, he says that it is the custom for women to cover their heads. But in Chapter 14, he says this:

“As to the custom in all communities of the sacred people, women are not to speak out in the meetings; they have no permission to speak out, and should be obedient, as the Law says. If they want to know something, they can ask their husbands later at home; it is not proper for a woman to speak out in the community. Or do you think you are the ones God's word comes from? Or the only ones it has come to? If one of you thinks he is a prophet or inspired, then he ought to recognize that what I am writing to you is one of the Master's commands—and if any of you does not recognize it, then he is the one who should not be recognized.”

This clearly indicates—to me, at least—that the “speaking out” or transmission of the Word to the community was recognized from the earliest times (that letter was written before any of the Gospels) as *not* something women were to do *by order of Jesus Himself*. And it has been the constant tradition of the Church since then that, though women have had a rank equal in status to Bishops (abbesses of convents held that rank), they were never ministers of the Sacraments or official transmitters of the Word to the community. So the question is Why, not Whether women can be priests.

I think the answer lies in the fact that the Bishop and priest *have no mind of their own* as such. They are pure vehicles for the transmission of something that is not theirs and that they have no control over. They are *not* leaders; they are *absolute followers*. They appear to be leaders, because they are the visible representatives of the one who is the real leader; but since they are purely His representatives, they must not let their own personality intrude upon the clear transmission of what Jesus has to say to the people they have contact with.

Now the interesting thing about women, as can be seen from Mary, is that women have control. It is the *woman's* choice that

determines the marital relationship; the man proposes, but the woman accepts or rejects. And the woman is the one whose gives personality and direction to the life style of the family; she has traditionally been the one who sets the tone of the family's life.

And Mary is the one who made the Redemption possible; she had the choice of accepting it or rejecting this opportunity. She was not commanded to accept; it was offered her; and presumably, if she had not accepted, the Redemption would not have happened. This can be seen from the contrast between the angel's reaction to Zechariah's difficulty and Mary's. Both asked, essentially, "How can this be, because there is an obstacle in the way?" In Zechariah's case, it was the age of Elizabeth, and evidently in Mary's (since she was already engaged to a man) it was a vow never to have sexual relations. The angel says to Zechariah, "Well, it's going to happen, and to show you, you are not going to be able to speak until it does happen." But the angel says to Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you," and so on; simply explaining the situation. No, it is clear that the angel was telling Zechariah the priest what was to happen, and expecting that he would go along with it; but the angel was offering something to Mary, and deferring to her will.

I think that what God is telling us in the exclusion of women from the sacramental ministry is that it contradicts what women *are* as a sign that they should become pure transmitters of what is not theirs. They can become Religious without contradicting their reality as women, since the choice to become a Religious is a control, just as the choice of Mary was as much a choice to accept as it was control. When a Religious offers obedience, then each time the Superior issues a command or expresses a wish, the Religious chooses to accept this as *his own direction of his own life*; and thus, the Religious is determining himself using the Superior's voice as information. He has "given up" his will without losing it.

But when the Pope, say, declares that contraception is not to be practiced among Christians, then in the first place, he is not directing

his own life (he is, after all, celibate), but is simply transmitting something to others as the truth about human sexuality. Secondly, he does not have the statement of others to “conform” to, but must discover what the Master wants from many ambiguous pronouncements from many quarters, and he must be very careful that he is discovering what the Master is saying, and is not expressing the “mind” of the majority in the Church, nor the thing that seems most reasonable to himself. He is like a radio; once tuned in to the proper signal, it proclaims what the signal says, and it does so best when nothing of itself creates static or noise.

Note that the Bishop is not a Theologian. The Theologian is the one who tries to discover the depths of the meaning of what is in the Revelation of Jesus. The Bishop (and the Pope’s pronouncements are those of the Bishops as a College, and not his own) does not have the function as such of plumbing the depths of the Revelation, but of preserving it intact: of pronouncing as to whether this or that Theological formulation is or is not consistent with the actual deposit of faith. The Theologian is a creative discoverer, as it were; the Bishop is essentially a conservative, a preserver.

Thus, women who say that they have a “vocation” to the priesthood are deluding themselves. They may be called to *share* in the transmission of hope to others, but not through performing the Sacramental ministry. This vanishing into conservation is not consistent with the Divine dimension of womanhood; women’s essence is creativity.

For women to consider it “unequal” for them not to have “leadership” roles in the Church is for women to repine because they do not share in the *abuse* of the priestly function. Yes, there have been and still are Bishops who interpret “ministry” as being synonymous with “majesty,” and who consider themselves “leaders” of their flock and not pure followers of their Master, who administer and govern rather than tune in and transmit, who judge and condemn rather than forgive and give hope, who act like corporate presidents rather than

slaves of the slaves. But this is not what the priesthood is; the priesthood is the priest vanishing so that Jesus can speak authentically through him—and, to take the traditional “justification,” finally—Jesus was male, not by accident but by Divine plan, and his spokesman, whether White, Black, Yellow, or Red, is a male, the son of a woman.

There is no question of “leadership” in Christianity. There is one “leader” and only one: Jesus, and He leads through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, not through the decrees of the hierarchy. The function of the hierarchy is to enable people to discover whether the Holy Spirit or their own spirit or the spirit of evil is prompting them; because the Holy Spirit does not contradict Himself, and if some prompting within you tells you to do something that the Bishop says is not Catholic, then this is not the prompting of the Holy Spirit. That is all. As to “leadership,” Jesus said, “The one among you who wants to be in the top position is to become the slave of everyone else.”

Finally, the layman is the human expression of the creative love that God has for his whole universe and each thing in it; the living out of a life that is a sacrament, as it were, of faith, because the layman *recreates* the material world unto the image and likeness of himself as divine, and thus divinizes everything he comes into contact with. Just as the cathedral of Chartres is a building which is stone speaking worship to God, a divine building, so everything the layman touches becomes something that speaks of God in the world, recreating it from within into something more than material, more than human, into something material, human, and divine.

The layman, like the priest, has the world for his goal and the love of God as his source. His Christianity consists in the fact that he does not see what he is working on as an expression of *himself*, but as an expression of *God*, working through his hands. His object is to rid himself of his own way of looking at things, his personal view of what he is working on, and to try to see it as God sees it, and to act on it

as God acting on it, not as he acts on it as human.

And, of course, this means giving up goals, and submitting to the things he is working on; not dominating the reality he deals with and wresting it to his will, but studying it and finding its potentials, and helping it be itself; his function as Christian is to disappear in his work, so that it is the work which achieves the reality, not the worker—just as the cathedral of Chartres is the work of God through the workers, who have no names, who are just his instruments of transformation of the world.

Sometimes the instrument is known, of course; the Theology of Thomas Aquinas is his as well as God's; but it was certainly not the intention of Thomas Aquinas to produce a Thomistic system of philosophy and Theology, but simply to be the vehicle by which the truth could emerge as well as possible through his weak mind (One who attempts philosophy and Theology is reminded at every sentence how weak his own mind is). If the instrument is to be known, then so be it; but the point is that this is irrelevant to the instrument. It is that the work achieve its *own* self-development that is the goal; and if the worker suffers and falls into oblivion, then this is perfectly fine.

We will, of course, be spending the rest of this book in a sketch of how this attitude expresses itself in the various phases of the lay life, so let this be enough to distinguish it from the priestly and Religious attitudes.

Note that not one of these ways of life is at all attractive. The Religious gives up everything, including the initiative in making choices; the priest gives up his own mind in favor of conservation of a truth that is not his; and the layman gives up his own self-expression. The Christian gives up his own fulfillment, whatever his state of life.

Now of course, there is a perversion of each of these states of life, which we find all too often. The Religious can give up responsibility and use the Religious life as a kind of welfare society where he can live quite comfortably. The priest can use his role as representative to assume "leadership" in the Church, and act as if his mind was the

mind of Jesus, instead of the other way round—as if he were the super-Theologian, in other words. And the layman, of course, is the one whose temptation is to find in self-expression self-fulfillment. That is, each state of life can be used as a vehicle in which to advance oneself, rather than a means of disappearing, of crucifixion, with a resurrection which is the act of someone else and not the goal of the work.

But then it isn't the Christian life at all. True, the resurrection of the Christian happens simultaneously with the crucifixion; the happiness of the fulfillment is one with the agony of self-repudiation; the life of the Spirit is the death of the "old man." The point is that the death is not *for* the life of oneself, as if one is a means toward the other, which is the "real thing." That makes the self the goal, and is not the Christian paradox. We do not die in order to live; the death *is* the life, because the life of the Spirit is the contradictory of the self-fulfillment which is Original Sin acting in us.

Discerning a vocation

So there is no way out of self-abandonment; if you are looking for your own fulfillment, you will not find the way in Christianity. You *will* find your fulfillment in Christianity, but not if you are looking for it.

The question now is which of the three states of life is a person called to? Each of us has a Christian vocation, and it is a vocation to some one of or some mixture of these three and only these three states of life. How do we discover which one the Master is calling us toward?

The answer is not that we are to listen for some mysterious voice whispering to us from the altar or the stained-glass of the church; the answer is within us. What calls us out of ourselves is what is in ourselves. Not that we are to listen to God's voice speaking within us, as if He had a little room there in our brain, and was going to say

something that we could hear. No, the answer is within us in the sense that it is our own reality. Our own reality calls us outside of itself in its own special way; and we answer the Christian call to forget ourselves by studying ourselves and our own natural tendencies.

That is, each of us has a nature which, in doing something, tends to become “lost” in what it is doing, so that the action is more significant to us than the agent. Thus, this action, and therefore this type of action, is the one which, if we pursue it, will make it easy and even natural and enjoyable to forget ourselves; and since self-forgetfulness is the negative side of the Christian vocation, then the kind of action that tends to make us forget ourselves is the kind of action that shows which state of Christian life we are called to.

Interestingly, the Religious vocation is found in the person who does *not* have anything special that takes him out of himself; he has not, as they say, “found himself,” which really means “lost himself”; there is nothing special about him by which he sees himself as fitting into the world. He has nothing special that he sees as making a contribution to things; and what this means is that he sees things in the light of the contribution they can make to his own fulfillment.

The world and the things of the world have an attraction to the potential Religious, to be sure; but the attraction they have is not a love of them for their own sake, but a desire to use them for himself. The layman, for instance, can be interested in studying physics for the sake of losing himself in the truth of it, or for what he can do for others either by pushing back the frontiers of knowledge about the material universe or manipulating the material universe to a new shape. The potential Religious would be interested in studying physics because he is good at it, and it is a difficult subject, and so people will recognize him as smart, and because if you know physics you can get a good job and make money and have high status and so on. If there is a contribution to make through his knowledge of physics, the potential Religious is interested in the contribution as a means to the reward that will come to him through it.

Again, the sexual aspect of the potential Religious' life is not one of having some special person that he wants to make happy; he is not in love with some one person. He is attracted, and perhaps to many; but he sees others as fulfilling to himself, and is not in the position where he simply does not care about his own satisfaction, so long as this other person can be satisfied.

The attitude of the potential Religious to those in authority over him is not one of being happy that he doesn't have to make up his own mind about what to do when they tell him things, but a kind of resentment that he *has* to do what they tell him, and can't do what he wants. He chafes under authority, in other words, and does not find it fulfilling.

I don't want to sound as if I am painting the potential Religious as evil, and the potential layman and priest as full of virtue. This is not the point, and there is nothing evil in seeking one's own fulfillment, as I mentioned. The point is that the potential Religious is the one whose *spontaneous* relation to things other than himself is not one of interest in *them for their own sake*, but in terms of *their relation to him*. That is, the world does not take this kind of person out of himself, it pushes him further back into himself; yet as a potential Christian he has a desire to make some sort of contribution and to do good, to forget himself.

In order to do this, his best course would be to exploit this generic tendency and to unite himself with the world in general by being its voice speaking, not of its relation to him, but of its relation to God. That is, this person who sees the world at first only in its relation to himself does not exactly turn his back on the world, but looks at it in a different way, in its subordination to God. He is already prepared to do this, because he already sees "the world," and all he really has to do is shift what he sees it as subordinate to from himself to God. As in all cases, Christianity is mainly a matter of mental adjustment; and the Religious type of alteration is easiest and most natural for the kind of person I have been describing.

Of course, this implies that he will now have to renounce the world as subordinated to *him*; he will have to renounce himself as the center of his universe. But that is the case with all Christians. The major task of the Religious, it seems to me, will be in the realization that the Religious, in renouncing ownership, sex and family, and his own initiative, now subsumes within himself the world in a new way, and that this way is the only practical way of accomplishing what he desired to do in the first place. If he can keep this in mind, and discover what it really means, the rest should be not only easy but enjoyable.

But it is not for me to discuss here how to do this, and why the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience are the way to accomplish it. That is for a treatise on the ascetical Theology of the Religious life, and this is a book on lay asceticism.

The call to the priesthood is the call of a man (as I said, it is only to males) who sees what a marvelous thing his faith is, coupled with a certain unhappiness because there are so many who do not have this blessing. It is this discontent more than anything else which is the sign here, because the unhappiness at others' lacking what one has is the mark that one cares about them.

But note that the priestly discontent is not the same as what is called "righteous indignation" at the sinner. One who says, "I love God; I love Him so much that I can't stand the way people are offending Him" had better not become a priest, but a Religious. This is the serpent's good and evil raising its head again. It cannot, as I said, be justified with "But I love the sinner; it's the sin I hate," because the sin defines the sinner, and if you hate the sin, you only *say* you love the sinner.

Nor is this "love of God" that is offended at offenses against him real love of God, because God is not offended at the sin. What is bad about sin is not what it does to God, but what it does to the person who knowingly commits it. So the priestly attitude has nothing really

to do with the eradication of sin in the world.

No, the discontent of the priest is that he sees the happiness, the peace, and the enjoyment that Christianity brings to himself and can bring to anyone who chooses to accept it; and his attitude toward the sinner is not anger, but hope that the sinner will avail himself of Christianity and have a chance to stop fighting himself.

Notice that this implies that the “pure” priest is not a social worker or a marriage counselor, though there are mixed states in which he can be both. He is, as a priest, not concerned with the *human* happiness of those he deals with, but with their growing in the faith, whether or not their temporal conditions are all that could be desired. Hence, there is no reason for a priest to feel guilty if he does not have any particular desire to better conditions in the inner city.

I might also mention that it is a sophism to say that you can’t talk to people about their souls if their bodies are starving, and it is directly counter to what Jesus said. He said that it was a *good* thing to be poor, to be suffering, to be oppressed, and so on, because *then* you start thinking about what is beyond this life; and it is *bad* for a person to be rich and have an easy life (to “laugh now,” as Luke puts it), because then this life seems to make sense without any transcendent dimension to it.

The desire to “improve” things is foreign to the priestly vocation as such, because, as I said, the priest is the pure conservative: the preserver of the Truth, and the pure transmitter of it. It is the gift which is precious; it is this gift which makes all the difference to him; it is the opportunity for people to receive this gift which is the only thing that matters.

And if the people don’t accept it, if they turn up their noses at it, or presume to give the priest advice on what he should “really” be saying if he wanted to make this a better place to live, how he should “adapt his words to the realities of the situation” and so on; if he finds, like Jesus, that most people can’t be bothered with what he says, and those who can be bothered persist in making of the Message the

exact opposite of what it is, degrading God's thoughts into their own idea of what God's thoughts "ought" to be—then this does not bother him, because it is the gift that is precious, and the offering, *not* the acceptance that is necessary.

It must always be kept in mind, especially by the priest, that Christianity is not a form of humanism; it is totally, utterly different in its essence from humanism, even though it is certainly not incompatible with alleviating the suffering of mankind. The humanistic aspect of Christianity, however, is part of the lay vocation, really; the priest's function is to preserve the gift and see that it is offered, to reveal what its acceptance entails and hold it out to people, with God's respect for their freedom.

One reason, perhaps, why the priestly vocation is rare, especially nowadays, is because it belongs to the person who says, "How utterly marvelous that human beings can live the life of God! How can I show them that this is something open to them?" This is the overriding concern for this type of person, not "helping the people," but *revealing* the truth of what their faith really means.

Again I say that there is nothing wrong with helping people, and that many is the priest who is *also* interested in helping people in one or many specific ways; but it is the realization of what the gift means that makes such a person a priest; and the helping is secondary to sharing the gift.

The priest lives poorly, not because he is "detaching himself" from worldly things, but because his poverty is a sign to others of the transcendent value of the gift; he renounces a wife and family, not to make a sacrifice of his sexuality to the love of God, but as Paul says, "I would like you not to be worried. An unmarried person is concerned about how he can please the Master; a married man is concerned about this world, and how he can please his wife—and he worries." He can pay attention to the gift first and last, and has a freedom to do anything in sharing it that family ties make difficult. And, of course, obedience to the Bishop, the Pope, the College of

Bishops, the tradition of the Church, and so on is simply that the gift is so tremendous that it must not be adulterated and “humanized” into a program of “advancement of the Masses.” (This, by the way, is the essential heresy in that “Liberation Theology” which is a quasi-Marxist class struggle choking on a Roman collar.)

The priest’s attitude, in other words, toward poverty, chastity, and obedience is quite different from that of the Religious; for the Religious, these virtues are ways of reorienting himself to the world and to God; ways of seeing the world in its relation to God, not himself. For the priest, they are practical matters which enable him to do his work of conserving and transmitting the gift of truth most efficiently to the people.

The lay vocation, by far the most common one, belongs to the person who feels that he has something specific to offer the world: something that he can do that will make at least one small corner of the universe a better place to live in. This need not necessarily be a grandiose desire or a remarkable talent that he sees in himself; it may be nothing more than that there is one special person in the world for him, and that he feels he would like to try to make her happy—not “better,” happy. Remember, the primary example of the Christian layman is St. Joseph, who is only distinguished by the fact that he loved Mary (and so was willing to put up with what had happened in her), and carpentry.

Of course, it is possible that the potential layman sees some great rift in the social structure that he would like to mend, some contradiction in scientific theory that he would like to see if he could solve, some new planet he would like to explore.

The point is that the potential layman is *interested* in something or someone; something other than himself fascinates him, and makes him want to find out about it, to improve it, to build it. And thus the layman is the builder; not the builder of Christianity, but simply the builder, the improver. The vocation to build or improve is already

generally half-Christian, because it takes the person's interest away from himself, and is not so much a question of self-expression or gain, but the desire to see whatever it is done (by someone).

And so the sole remaining task of the layman is just like that of persons with vocations to the other states of life: to shift his mental ground so that he consciously becomes the vehicle by which God performs his re-creative activity on the world.

It is not surprising that a person with this orientation should be looked on as "not having a vocation." Even though we are constantly told that it is false to identify the supernatural with the anti-natural, we persist in thinking this way; and since the lay vocation is the most "natural" (in the sense of common) of all, we find it hard to see it as particularly Christian.

But even though the layman does not have God as his goal, even though he is attached very passionately to the world, even though he is not interested in making the world more Christian and preaching the Gospel, he is still as Christian as anyone else, because he is interested in *making* the world more *Christianly*. We must keep in mind the Christianity is really a question of adverbs.

The paradox of Christianity shows itself most clearly in the lay life, and produces the layman's greatest temptation. The good Christian layman is not tormented by the lures of the world anywhere near as much as he is by this thought: "There are billions of souls to be won, countless prayers left unsaid, starvation and injustice all over the world, the morals of everyone are falling apart, and am I to devote my waking hours to a study of the Great Red Spot on Jupiter?"

This is good and evil again; the temptation that the "good" (by which is meant the preaching of the Gospel or the alleviation of suffering) *must* be done, and to do something that is "a little good" and to leave these evils uncorrected is somehow sinful.

This is, of course, not just a temptation for the lay life. The person who wants to enter the Religious life because it is "objectively better" has fallen into the same trap; and once he gets there, he will say to

himself, “There are abortions killing people by the millions, and here I am saying the Divine Office and farming inefficiently.” The priest has the temptation, “Here I am preaching sermons that no one wants to hear, sitting in a confessional that no one comes to, and the people outside my Rectory haven’t got enough to eat because the government programs aren’t working! What am I doing?”

This guilt assumes that Christianity is a way of getting something done, that God is calling us because he wants to use us as tools for some objective purpose he has, which, of course, is producing something good or eradicating some evil. But good and evil are human ways of doing things, and purposiveness is a human way of approaching things. There is nothing wrong with purposiveness, but this is not God’s point of view; and so it has nothing, really, to do with the call God is giving us to our Christian state of life.

The one, in whatever state of life, who succumbs to the temptation above, in fact, misses the one criterion we have to decide on a state of life: our vocation comes, not from what “has to be done,” but from what we are. And many is the person who has messed his life up because he chose based on what he thought had to be done, not on what he was. Those who become Religious because this is the “more perfect thing” find themselves, years later, chafing under constraints they don’t really understand, which to them in fact make no sense, realizing that they aren’t more “perfect” than they were before they entered the life—and certainly no one else is better off for their being there. Yet, with this mentality, they are afraid of “rejecting grace” if they leave, and so they stay on, discontented, disoriented, disdainful of their way of life, and a disaster to all concerned. Or they leave, thinking that they have failed God, and consequently give up, disgusted with all religion in general and the institutional Church in particular.

The priest who yields to this temptation is the person who becomes a priest to seek holiness—not to share the gift, but for his personal sanctification, since the priesthood is the way you go when you want

to be holy. And we see these priests everywhere. They didn't make it, because the priesthood is the way of holiness only when you don't care so much about your holiness as you do about the means for others' being holy; so these priests turn themselves into half-baked marriage counsellors and armchair psychologists, or worse, social-working zealots—anything, in fact, to conquer the unutterable boredom of the life of the rectory. If only they could marry, they think; then they could have a family life to comfort them and free them from this tedium so that they could do some real good. Some have tried this—of course, having left the priesthood to do so—and have discovered the truth of Paul's statement. The family is fine, but it doesn't free a person; just the opposite. The wife of a man who has married to be free from care has a fool for a husband.

We see laymen with this same fungus upon them; they are the pathetic ones who seek their "perfection" in what they call "involvement" in the Parish Council, in the liturgy commissions, in the trendy causes that blow them hither and yon. They are so interested in updating the institutions that they have no time for uplifting themselves; as far as their religion is concerned, it is one long complaint at what Rome has to say that stifles "true reform," what the Bishops are up to now, the stupidity of the parish priest who won't listen to their plans for increasing membership, and on and on. Their Christianization of their home lives consists in turning it into a miniature monastery, and pestering the members of the family into practices of prayer; their Christianization of the work they do is nil, except perhaps for some embarrassing proselytizing of their colleagues.

Now there is nothing wrong with most of what the people in each of these states of life want to do; but the point is that they are *not* part of the vocation to that state of life; they are part of the attitude that "the good must be done"; they are the imposition of one's own goals and values on others, and not a respect for reality—least of all a respect for one's own reality.

And this is by no means to say that there can't be people who have

vocations that include as part of the vocation what I have said are temptations for the person called to the “pure” state of life. There are Religious who primarily are the type whose happiness comes in contemplation of God in the world and praising him for his marvelous creation, but who also see the potentials in that world by which it can help itself manifest its share in Divine Being more fully. There are priests who care desperately about the gift of revelation, but also see that this can promote and be promoted by psychological stability. There are laymen so filled with wonder at God’s creation that, though their lives are primarily involved with an improvement of his world, they want time to contemplate it as his. And so on. There are, as I have said so often, mixed states of life, and each person is called by his own nature to some sort of mixture of the three attitudes, which means that no one will be the “pure” Religious, priest, or layman, and each will emphasize different things in his own life; so that it is not possible to judge from outside whether a person has missed his vocation or is fulfilling it—except content or discontent.

One of the real problems with the “good and evil” way of looking at religion is that “contentment” is apt to be a dirty word. If God has as his “purpose” for us infinite satisfaction, then there is a moral imperative to be *dis*contented with any satisfaction we might find here and now in this life. Hence, the Christian is apt to feel guilty if he feels fulfilled, and feel virtuous if he is miserable. To desire the unattainable is supposed to be what Christianity is all about, and happiness is to come only after the pilgrimage. But then what about the hundred times as much here in this life? If fervor means discontent, it is not Christian fervor; the Christian is relaxed.

And there is the point, really. The Christian call calls a person out of self-centeredness; but it was given for the Christian, not that he be used for the sake of something else. And so, the fruits by which you shall know of the vocation is basic contentment. God loves a cheerful giver, not because he wants you to give and then work at being cheerful about it, but because the giving, when it fits your personality

is cheering, and the cheer is a sign of God's vocation.

Now of course, there is another sense in which the vocation of God is your actual choice, especially an irrevocable choice; because God's will for you is what you actually choose. In this sense, there is no question of having "missed a vocation"; *that* vocation was an abstraction, like the perfect being you would have been if you had not sinned.

So the priest who thinks he has missed his vocation and should have been a layman is deluding himself—especially if he sincerely, though perhaps ignorantly, chose to enter the priesthood to "serve God." A good deal of any Christian's vocation consists in making the best of his limitations; and a great many of our limitations are brought upon us by choices we made in the past. This is not just something that belongs to the priesthood. We all wonder "what would I be if I hadn't done . . ." If I hadn't married, if I hadn't entered the convent, if I hadn't taken this job, if I hadn't been sent here.

We all, from time to time, think that we could have been happier if we had chosen the other branch at some crossroad; but the point is what difference does it make? We chose what we chose, and what does our happiness matter anyway? We could have been happier, perhaps if we were taller, more brilliant, more athletic, not Black, or whatever; but these are limitations built into our genes, and our respect for our own reality means acceptance of ourselves absolutely.

It is a little harder to accept absolutely what we have made ourselves, because we think, "Yes, but I didn't know all the facts, and I should have been more careful, and I should have waited before I decided, and I should have done this and I should have done that . . ." You are a fool. Of course you are a fool. So what?

So, given that you are in a state of life, this is your vocation. The question is not how you got yourself into it; the question is what you do with your life now that you are in it. What is your reality now? Where is your contentment within the context of what you are, your

commitments? That is your present vocation. Choosing a state of life is for those who have the options open to them; for those who have already chosen, the question of the vocation to a state of life is already settled.

This again is not to say that there can't be vocations out of one state of life to another—always supposing that irrevocable commitments haven't been made. Priests who think they have a “new vocation” to the lay state (especially the married lay state) are almost certainly deluded, just as married men who fall in love with someone and think they have a “vocation” to divorce and remarry are deceived. In very rare instances, a priest might actually be called away from the ministry, just as in really exceptional cases, a man who falls in love with someone might have his wife die and leave him free to marry his new love.

Of course, if a priest, say, follows his delusion and leaves the ministry and gets married, or if a layman gets divorced and “marries” again, then each of these people has *now* a new vocation of finding a way to Christianize the state he has got himself into—which may be far from easy.

But it is possible for a person to be called to the Religious life, say, for a number of years and then be called out of it; it is possible for a person to be called to the lay life and then called to another state. You can't tie the hands of the Holy Spirit. Your commitments do not commit God. Even if you take perpetual vows, as I did, it does not follow that the Holy Spirit can't be giving you a temporary vocation to the Religious life. My vows, for instance, included the proviso that they were perpetual if the Order saw fit to keep me as a member. When I wrote to the Provincial after a retreat about my vocation he asked me to make and gave him the evidence that seemed to indicate that I was now being called to the lay state, he did not see fit to keep me as a member any longer. I had thought that this question of my state in life was settled forever once I had taken perpetual vows; but

the Holy Spirit is not bound by our commitments.

This is not to say that we should regard all commitments as provisional; it simply means that the Holy Spirit is absolutely free, however bound we might be. I am now committed to a marriage partner until—when? Tomorrow? As far as I am concerned, we are together forever and ever, even into the next life (though there will be no “marrying” there in the sense of “rights of sex over each other”; but this certainly does not mean that death severs companionship). But we can certainly be separated at any time in this life by an Act of God. The point is that *I* can’t effect the separation.

And, of course, the upshot of all of this is, first of all, that your vocation depends on what you are; and so to find the true vocation you have here and now means studying yourself with God’s eyes on your reality—as objectively as you can possibly do it—and considering the direction your nature tends to lose self-interest in; and then following that direction. Self-abandonment is then identical with self-fulfillment, and you once again live the Christian paradox.

And since God is running the universe, and is running your own life too, don’t worry about mistakes. You look at yourself as objectively (Divinely) as you can, seek advice from those you think are intelligent, and make your choice in faith; and your Master, who has chosen to call you His friend, will see to it that his slave will have chosen to step upon the road that will lead him through the green pastures, the still ponds, and the banquet with the brimming goblets. There is nothing to worry about. Nothing.

Chapter 4

The Layman at Home

Sexual ethics

I said in an earlier chapter that we didn't begin our Christian lives as laymen, because the life of a child is not yet his true life; this is his preparation for life. The lay life is essentially the life of an adult. Still, one of the first things that happens when adulthood comes upon us is sexual attraction, which naturally leads to the life of marriage and the family; and so Christian sexuality, Christian marriage, and Christian family life are a good place to begin this sketch of what it means to "practice perfection" in the lay state.

I wrote the original draft of this book some ten years ago or so; and when I got to this chapter, I didn't include anything special on sexual ethics, because Christianity is not an ethic of do's and don't's, but an attitude; and I wanted to stress what the Christian attitude did toward sexuality, marriage, and the family. I still want to.

But at the time of that draft, I felt that I could presuppose, among Catholics anyway, that everyone knew what the morality of sexuality was—if not the reasons, at least the acts that were morally right and wrong. But those days have passed. I was conversing at lunch with a nun in my college a couple of years ago (she has since left the convent), and made some remark about sex and the Pope's statements. "I don't need anyone in Rome telling me about sex," she said. "I can make up my own mind."

"It's funny," I said, somewhat taken aback. "People are willing to

admit limits to any activity you want to name except sex. With sex anything goes.”

“That’s not true,” she said. “I think there are certain things that are wrong in sex.”

“Name one.”

“Well...incest.”

“Interesting,” I answered. “Incest happens to be the sexual wrong that has the least amount of evidence to prove that it’s wrong.”

She looked at me indignantly, and that ended the conversation.

The point, I suppose, is that, since the introduction of The Pill, we all “just know” what is natural and what is unnatural in sex now; we don’t sit down and investigate any more, because the thing to do in sex is follow your “true reality,” which is the way you feel about things.

If someone with a Christian spirit has misgivings about this, then he’s on the right track. Your feelings are about as sure a guide as to what is natural in sex as they are as to what you ought to be doing when you sit down in the dentist’s chair.

But remember, the Christian looks on things with God’s eyes: that is, with absolute, dispassionate realism. And the Christian acts consistently with the way the reality is, whether this happens to be what “feels right” or not; and the Christian is ready to say that many of the things he is going to do do not “feel right,” because the cross will never “feel right.” And sex involves the cross, if we are to use it in perfect conformity with its nature, because it involves love, which is *not* self-fulfillment or self-expression, but self-*sacrifice*. Yes, when sex is an act of love, it is an act of self-denial and self-sacrifice, and any pleasure or fulfillment in it is a gift that is not its purpose.

But this is the Christian use of sex, which I will have to defer, because of all the confusion that has arisen, until I discuss the ethics of sex.

The ethics of sex is basically negative, because it deals with the limits of sexual expression, beyond which the sex act contradicts itself in one way or another. That is, the moral command says, basically, that you must never deliberately act as if things weren't the way you know they really are; you must never act inconsistently with yourself.

I have treated the subject of ethics in general, and made applications to sexuality in particular, in my book *Human Conduct*. I think the most efficient way to proceed here would be simply to reproduce the section on sexuality from that book.

By way of introduction, let me remark that the idea is that you may never fulfill any aspect of yourself in such a way that you contradict any other aspect of yourself. Thus, you may never fulfill yourself financially, for instance, by embezzlement (thus using money that doesn't belong to you). I will begin before the section dealing with sex by mentioning what is now called bulimia (eating and throwing up) and used to be referred to by the name "gluttony."

One other remark. If an act has two *independent* effects, one of which is wrong (inconsistent), the act may sometimes be chosen if the Principle of the Double Effect applies; it states (a) that the act itself must have nothing wrong about it in itself, (b) that it must have a good effect in addition to the bad one, (c) that the bad one may not be a means to the good one, (d) that the bad effect may not be wanted, and (e) that the bad effect of *not* performing the act is *worse* than the bad effect it has. If these rules are fulfilled, then you have avoided *choosing* the bad effect.

Here, then, is what it says in *Human Conduct* (p. 118 ff.):

It is *morally wrong*, however, to suppress *one* of the functions of a *multi-function* faculty and *exercise* the faculty for one of its other functions.

In this case, you are pretending that the faculty doesn't do what it does; and this is different from either exercising or not exercising it. You want to exercise it, *but here you want its function to be only part*

of what its function is, and thus you contradict the nature of the faculty in its very exercise.

Boulimia is a good example of this, insofar as it would be deliberately chosen. What this is is eating and then either throwing up or taking a laxative so that the food will not be digested. Eating has a pleasure-giving function, and it also involves the assimilation of the food into the body.

Now it may be that you are taking in more food than your body needs, and in fact enough food so that you are harming your health (i.e. doing damage to your body). It is obviously good not to do this; and clearly, not eating is a way to prevent it.

But when you try to prevent it *by eating and then suppressing digestion*, you are *exercising* the faculty of nutrition *in such a way that it only does part of what it does*, and this is morally wrong. You are pretending that eating is *only* for the taste, and that the exercise of the faculty has nothing to do with assimilation of the food—which is a falsification of the faculty’s function.

Note that there is nothing wrong with eating things that taste good and have no food value (that can’t be digested)—supposing no damage is done to the body by eating this kind of thing, as might be the case if you eat so much of it that you are undernourished.

The reason why this is not wrong is that you are *not preventing* your digestive faculty from doing all that it does; it is just that the things you ate can’t be assimilated. Thus, drinking diet pop, which contains nothing nourishing, is not a contradiction of your nutritive faculty. Here you are *not asserting* the assimilative aspect of eating; but you are not *doing anything to contradict it* either. In the case of eating and purging, you are *preventing* the exercise of part of the function while exercising the function.

This is fairly easy to see with regard to nutrition. Its application to sex, however, is what is now called “controversial.” I find it fascinating that people who are quite willing to admit restrictions on all of our other activities sometimes act as if sex were special and sacred, and no

restrictions upon it are to be even mentioned.

But let us look at sex. Sex is one of these multi-function faculties; it has a pleasure-aspect; it involves another person, and so must respect the personhood and rights of the other person; and it is the faculty of reproduction, though humans are not always fertile.

To *exercise* the sexual faculty *in such a way that one or more of its functions is suppressed* is morally wrong.

1. First of all, *masturbation* is wrong, because it is an exercise of the sexual faculty in such a way that it *denies* that it has anything to do with another person or with reproduction; it pretends that sex is purely for pleasure, nothing else.

Thus, even if masturbation has a good purpose, such as the relief of tension (or even something like freeing oneself from an irresistible urge to commit adultery), it cannot morally be done, because you would have to choose the contradiction of the faculty in order to achieve the purpose.

2. Secondly, *homosexual acts* are morally wrong, because the *kind* of exercise of the sexual faculty which occurs between two people of the same sex, even if they love each other, *cannot be construed as having anything to do with reproduction*.

There is nothing wrong with *being* homosexual; i.e. being sexually attracted to someone of the same sex. In general, it would be wrong *deliberately* to get yourself into this state, since it would tend to lead to homosexual acts; but deliberately becoming homosexual almost never happens. One finds out that he is homosexual; and the discovery is usually rather traumatic.

Nor is there anything wrong with *loving* another member of the same sex, whether you are homosexual or not; and the only thing wrong with *expressing* this love by caresses and so on *is the danger that these acts may lead to homosexual use of the sex faculties*. Insofar as that danger is remote, then the acts of showing affection for another of the same sex are not morally wrong. There is, of course, not only the danger to yourself, but to the other person to consider. You may be

under complete control; but he might not be.

A homosexual might object to all this that his *nature* is homosexual, and therefore, why is it a contradiction of *his* nature to express it? As I said above, it is *not* a contradiction of the homosexual nature to express affection for others of the same sex; but to use the *sexual faculty* in doing so contradicts the faculty as *reproductive*; the homosexual is *denying* that the exercise of the faculty has anything to do with reproduction. So it is not his nature *as attracted to other persons* that is contradicted; it is his nature *as reproductive* that is contradicted by homosexual *exercise of the sexual organs*.

Note that even if homosexuality is genetic, this does not mean that one has permission to exercise his faculty according to its genetic tendency. People are born with all sorts of defective organs, such as eyes that cannot see or see in distorted ways, club feet, cleft palates, and so on.

People also have tendencies that could be innate and certainly weren't deliberately sought, such as sadistic urges to torture others. But no one would say that, just because you have such a tendency, it is all right to gratify it. Of course, homosexual acts do no harm to others, in general; the point is that "natural" *does not automatically mean* "able to be fulfilled." And the fact is that, even if a person is born homosexual, this particular innate disposition cannot fulfill itself without contradicting the faculty it is using while it is using the faculty. Hence, even if it is an innate disposition, it is a defective one ("defective," not "evil" or "perverted," which have moral overtones; but it can't fulfill itself without contradiction); it is *not* just a "different state" like left-handedness.

3. In the third place, *rape* is morally wrong, even if it is for the purpose of having a child. *Rape is the sexual use of another person against that other person's will*. It is either having sex with another when the other doesn't want to, or having sex *in such a way* that the other person is repelled and unwilling.

This, of course, is wrong because it *denies the self-determination of*

the other person. It deprives the other person of the right to choose whether to have sex, or how to have it. It does not recognize the other person as anything more than a tool to be used for one's own purposes.

Note that *this also applies to one's marriage partner*. If you enjoy some particular type of sexual activity and your partner doesn't and positively doesn't want to engage in sex in that way, then *to force it on your partner is morally wrong*. You can't hide behind the fact that marriage gives you the *right* to sex with that person. It only gives the right to *consistent* sex with that person, *not* to every conceivable kind of sexual activity.

I hasten to add that many of the acts that are called "perverted" and are done between homosexuals, for instance, are all right by way of foreplay between marriage partners; as long as they don't constitute the whole act and it can reach its completion in a way that does not deny its reproductive character. It does *not save* such non-reproductive types of exercise of the sexual faculty such as oral sex that they are done between a man and a woman; what "saves" them is (a) that they are preliminaries leading up to a reproductive use of the faculty (and so don't pretend that it is only part of itself); and (b) both partners are willing to do these acts (and so one is not being used for the gratification of the other).

Note that one's partner need not particularly *enjoy* having sex at a given time or in a given way; it is that *the partner must not be positively unwilling to do it*. You do not have to *assert* any particular function of an act; you must simply *not deny* any of its aspects *when exercising the faculty*.

Thus, it is perfectly all right to have sex because it is tuesday and you both agreed (for some reason) that tuesdays are a day you have sex on; neither of you especially wants sex on this particular tuesday, but both are willing. Sex does *not have to be thrilling*; it is perfectly all right if it is routine. It is even permissible not to especially like it. Do not be deluded by our culture of sex; it does not have to be the be-all

and end-all of a relationship of love between two people. The way some sex manuals talk, it is almost as if you not rising three feet off the bed every night makes you immoral. This is nonsense.

4. In the fourth place—here it comes—*contraception* is morally wrong, however it is done. But let us be clear what this is: it is *taking a reproductive act when it is reproductive and doing something to suppress its reproductiveness with the intention of exercising the faculty as if it weren't reproductive when it is.*

That's a long definition. The point is that the woman is not always fertile, and therefore *sex, in itself, is not always reproductive, even though it is always a reproductive kind of activity.* That is, sex (and only sex) is the kind of activity which can reproduce; and so it is always a reproductive *kind* of activity. It is this, actually, which is denied by masturbation or homosexual sex.

But not every act of this type is *in fact reproductive.* Thus, one *need not intend that there be children every time one exercises the sexual faculty.*

It is a calumny to assert that those who hold that contraception is wrong say that “*The*” purpose of sex is to have children. That would make sex after menopause morally wrong (since the woman can't have children then), and there are precious few ethicists who have ever held this.

But

It is simple dishonesty to take the act of sex *when it is reproductive* and *prevent it* from doing part of what it does. And that is what contraception does. No one would use a contraceptive during times when it was *known* that the woman was infertile, and that no child could result from the act. Why would one? No, the only reason that the “pill” is taken during infertile times of the month is that if it isn't, then it won't make the person infertile during the times when she is by nature fertile; and the person wants to be infertile during the times when she is fertile.

Is this a contradiction or is it a contradiction?

Note that it is not morally wrong, using the Double Effect, to have sex *only* during infertile times; and even to *take steps to discover* when these infertile times are.

Remember, the problem with contraception is *not* “not having children”; it is *the contradiction in performing a reproductive act which is not reproductive*. It can be, as I said earlier, *good and even morally necessary not to have any more children*, if they can’t be brought up decently.

So the question is *not* a question of the *purpose*; it is one of the nature of the act as an exercise of a faculty. And since the faculty is not always reproductive, *then it may be exercised when it is not reproductive*, if the five rules of the Double Effect are met:

1) The act of having sex at a time when the woman is not fertile is consistent with the nature of sex; 2) the act has a good effect: one avoids children who cannot be decently brought up; but *it also has a bad effect*, because to exercise the act *only* during these times makes *the whole series of acts not reproductive, and thus the sexual activity of the couple as a whole not reproductive*—more or less analogously to homosexual sex.

The act is still the *kind* of act that is a reproductive kind of activity; but the *deliberate* exercise of it only when not reproductive, has the effect of *denying* that one’s sexual activity *as such* has anything to do with reproduction.

But since this is *the effect* of a whole series of acts, and is not in any one of them, this bad effect may be *an unchosen side-effect* of the acts of sex.

To continue with the rules: 3) the *non-reproductiveness of all of one’s sexual activity* must not be the means toward the good effect. And it is not, in general; what is desired is that *this act* not result in a child one cannot support, not that, should conditions change, one *never* have a child. 4) The non-reproductiveness of the whole of one’s sexuality cannot be what is wanted; it is just unfortunate that now one cannot afford a child. And 5) the bad effect of possible non-repro-

ductiveness of sexual activity as a whole must not be worse than what would happen if one refrained from sex altogether.

Thus, the “rhythm” or “sympto-thermal” method of family planning cannot be engaged in lightly, because there *is* a bad effect of this kind of thing. It must be a method of family *planning*, not of family *avoidance altogether*. Sex in general is reproductive; and so results in “family.”

5. Finally, *artificial insemination*, even by the husband’s sperm, is morally wrong.

Why is this? This is a use of the woman’s sexual organs *purely* for reproduction. It must have *nothing to do with sexual arousal or with love of the person using the organs*, because this person is generally a physician. Consider what is happening. The man who impregnates the woman is not her husband, and he is not impregnating her with his sperm, but someone else’s. He must not arouse her when he uses her sexual organs, because he doesn’t want her to love him; this is just a business deal with him, or a favor to the couple. She must try not to feel pleasure at what he is doing, or she might be aroused toward him. The husband just stands aside, even if it is his sperm that the woman is being impregnated with; and of course if it isn’t, then her doing this “out of love for him” so that “they” can have a child is a farce; he has nothing whatever to do with the whole procedure.

You can see what a mockery this makes out of sex.

Marital ethics

That is the end of the passage dealing with the sexual act itself. Pages 202-214 of *Human Conduct* deal with the nature of sex and marriage, sex and love, and sex and the family; and I think that I will just insert them here.

I said in the last chapter that there were two “natural” societies. Actually, there are three, or perhaps two and a half: marriage

(technically called *conjugal society*, though I won't use the term), the family (including the children), and civil society. The first society naturally develops into the second, which therefore is a kind of extension of it.

These societies are "natural" in the sense that a person either is a member whether he wants to be or not (as a child in the family, or a person in civil society), or that the conditions of the society are not open completely to a person's free choice, as in marriage. Certain things that might be called "marriage" actually contradict what marriage is about, and are morally wrong.

Let us begin, then, with marriage. For a more extended treatment of marriage as a society than you will find here, see my book, *Social Philosophy*. I will try to include what is necessary to make a case for the moral conclusions.

(Be aware that I am going to be referring to "the other person" as "he," following what is still acceptable English usage. This is apt to sound as if what is being written is from the woman's point of view; but of course this is not the case. It is, again, the generic use of the pronoun, and refers as much to a woman as to a man. Everything that is said in this chapter, unless specifically stated, refers to *both* women and men.

Marriage is the society which provides the opportunity for the exercise of the sex faculties consistently.

Sex, then, implies marriage. Why is this? Sex, as I said in section 6.3.1., is a multi-function act that involves pleasure, another person, and is the type of act that is reproductive. There are two basic reasons why this entails forming a society: first, since it is morally wrong to *try to prevent* there being *any* children from one's sexual activity (since this would deny its reproductiveness), then one must be in a situation in which children who may be caused can be brought up decently toward adulthood. But children need the influence of both parents for this; single parent families can be allowed only when the Double

Effect applies, because this sort of thing has a danger of damage to the child. Hence, it is contradictory for two people to have sex and say, “Well, if there are children, I (or you) will be able to care for them by my(your)self.”

Secondly, the sexual act itself tends by nature to *attach* a person by strong emotional ties to the partner. Recent experiments with “open marriages” have shown that even couples who thought they were willing to let their partners have sex with anyone else they wanted found that extremely often at least one of the partners could not cope emotionally with this.

Hence, even if one person knows that he will not become attached to his sex partner, he cannot predict that the other will not become permanently emotionally dependent on him, because the act is of its nature apt to have this effect. Hence, to leave the other person means using the other for one’s own satisfaction, and violates the personhood of the other.

Therefore, the sexual act in itself is the act of marriage of two people, and consequently it is wrong to exercise it outside a marriage.

Sex is *not* simply the “friendliest thing two people can do.” It is that, but it is more than that; it is by nature *committing*.

Marriage forms a society between two people until one of them dies.

The reason for this is threefold. First, marriage must last at least until any children reach adulthood, or it contradicts the nature of the children (and therefore the reproductive nature of sex in its consequences). Secondly, since the attachment of sex does not have any natural limit, it contradicts this aspect of its nature to terminate a marriage when a partner “falls out of love.” Thirdly, since old people have a need for companionship and—yes, sex—and since old people are not attractive any longer, the only practical way this need can be met is if marriages remain through old age.

Young people are apt not to realize this last point, which becomes very important as one becomes old. And in our youth-oriented

society, we find many, many very lonely and sexually frustrated old people who only now realize the terrible effects of divorce upon themselves.

Separation from a marriage partner is not morally wrong when the Double Effect applies; but remarriage after separation has bad effects which make it for practical purposes always morally wrong.

If a person is beaten or otherwise abused by a marriage partner, then the bad effects of separation (on both partners and the children) may be less severe than the bad effects on all concerned with staying together. Remember, since others (especially the children) are involved, the “worst case” must be used, and one cannot impose one’s own ideas of what is bad on others: in general, it is worse to be deprived of parents than to have two parents who are quarreling constantly.

This might occur. But if remarriage after separation is allowed, then (a) this creates an *incentive* to separate when one person “falls in love” with someone else, and so undermines the stability of what is in any case a difficult relationship; (b) people tend to *enter* marriage with the idea that “if it doesn’t work, we can try with someone else,” which undermines even the initial commitment; (c) children, who have “parents” who are not their parents suffer greatly; (d) a partner who deeply loves the other (and is therefore greatly attached) might out of love be *predisposed* not to fight the other’s desire to be “free,” and thus the love in marriage works against itself when divorce is allowed.

On the other hand, if remarriage is never allowed, then this creates an incentive for the couple to work out the difficulty, because they realize that they must live together, and hence have to adapt to the realities of the situation. This in fact is what love really is. Hence, the impossibility of remarriage after separation acts to create the conditions under which in practice a rational marriage is possible.

And the practical consequences of allowing remarriage after separation is that the “extreme cases” very rapidly become watered

down (because those on the borderline of the “extreme” justly resent not being allowed what others not really different can do), and so divorce and remarriage, instead of being extremely unusual, becomes almost the norm.

And we see what we now have in our society, in little more than two generations: what used to be marriage is now serial polygamy, with half the couples who get “married” divorcing.

Now then, just as marriage is one of the implications of sex, so sex is one of the implications of marriage. Since marriage is the society whose function is to enable sex to be exercised consistently, it follows that

Homosexual couples cannot marry.

Note that this does not say that they “may not” marry or are “forbidden” to marry. It is impossible for them to have a marriage. The reason is that homosexual sexual acts are morally wrong; hence their sexual activity cannot be exercised toward each other consistently inside or outside a permanent commitment.

It is not morally wrong for two homosexuals who love each other but have no intention of having sexual relations to agree to live together permanently, provided that this is not putting them in danger of having sex with each other. But this is not a marriage, strictly speaking, even though it may have many of the characteristics of marriage.

For heterosexuals to live together with no intention of ever having sex is not a marriage, and to go through a marriage ceremony with this in mind is morally wrong.

Living together “as brother and sister,” as they say, is not morally wrong, and, using the Double Effect, it would not be wrong for two people to commit themselves to each other for this kind of life (a special case of this was, presumably, Mary the mother of Jesus and Joseph, if what the Bible says is true). The Double Effect must be used, because it involves the bad effect of committing both parties to the non-exercise of sex, when opportunities for a true marriage with

someone else might appear. But this living together, which has all the characteristics of marriage except sex, is not a marriage.

The reason it would be wrong to go through a marriage ceremony with this in mind would be that the marriage gives each partner the *right* to have sex with the other; and it is in general contradictory to extend this right with the intention that *the other person* never exercise it. The reason for doing something like this would have to be very serious in order to make the Double Effect apply (e.g. if it were the only way to prevent a woman's being "given" to someone else against her will).

Since sex has a reproductive dimension, it also follows that to enter marriage with the intention of having sex but never having a child is immoral.

We saw that contraception is wrong, and having sex only at infertile times has the bad effect of denying the reproductive aspect of the whole of one's sexuality. If one enters "marriage" with the *intention* of having no children means that one intends *all* of one's sexual activity in the "marriage" to be non-reproductive, which contradicts one of its aspects. Hence, sex would not be used consistently in this kind of relationship, and it is therefore not a marriage.

This does not mean, of course, that a couple has to intend to have "lots and lots" of children; in general, as we saw, a couple has to *limit* the number of children they cause to begin to exist to the number that can be decently brought up by them. This may be no more than one child. It is only a contradiction when the intention is to have no children at all.

Of course, this does not mean that an older couple cannot marry, even though they realize that no children can result from their sexual activity. They do not *intend* not to have any children, and their activity is such that it is the kind of activity that is reproductive; it is just that they realize that children are not, by nature, possible for them. Hence, they have not chosen to make their sexual activity less

than what it is; it is less than what it would have been if they were younger; but it now is what it is, without children. Hence, this is still a consistent use of sexuality, and is a true marriage—though not as complete as a marriage that results in children.

And a couple who marry and find that one or the other is infertile have a marriage. They do not intend childlessness; it is just that their sexuality can't have children; and so they act consistently with what it is. They do not have to adopt a child for their marriage to be a true one, though of course there is nothing wrong with adopting a child, and this can for various reasons be a very good act.

That is a sketch of the relation between sex and marriage. Now what is the relation between marriage and love? It isn't what you think it is.

Marriage is the only society which presupposes that the members have actual love for each other.

First, let us define what actual love is.

Love is the *choice* whose goal is *someone else's goal*.

That is, it is the choice to do what is good for someone other than oneself. But since "good" is subjective, this has some rather startling implications.

Love is the acceptance of the *other person's* notion of "good" and acting accordingly, rather than the imposition of one's own idea of what is "good" on the other person.

To do what *you think* is "good for" another person is not an act of love, especially if this *contradicts* what the other person thinks is good for him. Then you are imposing your subjective ideals on the other person and *refusing* to recognize his self-determination (which involves choosing for himself his own ideals). This is the opposite of love, even though it is what many people think love is all about.

Love is a *willingness to be used* by another person.

That is, it is a willingness to let the *other person's* will and ideals determine the direction of one's *own* choices. It gives up self-determination and allows control to be exercised by the other

person. Thus, love is *not* fulfilling for the self; self-fulfillment is precisely *irrelevant* where love is involved.

Note that it is not *love* to do what is *morally wrong* or *damaging to oneself* because one's beloved wants this. It is immoral to choose what is wrong out of such misguided "love."

The reason is that it is a violation of the *beloved's* nature for him to want his lover to do what is wrong or for him to want the beloved to violate his own nature. Hence, to choose this would be to choose the *violation* of the beloved's nature, which is clearly contradictory to love.

So love is a willingness to be *used* by one's beloved, but it cannot be a willingness to be *abused* by him.

Now then, the reason why marriage presupposes love is that sex without love implies a contradiction. Since the sex drive is so strong and the emotions involved so violent, the strength of the emotions, if left to themselves, would tend to make one use the other person for the sake of one's own gratification, and would therefore violate the respect one owes to the self-determination of the other.

That is, *the emotions of sex are in themselves selfish, not other-directed*. And so not to make a *deliberate choice* to restrict one's own gratification and recognize the needs and desires of the partner is to violate the partner's nature.

Sex becomes an act of love when one adjusts one's activity to the desires of one's partner and the realities of the act itself.

That is, when one *foregoes* one's own satisfaction for the sake of the other's, then the act becomes an act of love. If one does not do this, then the act tends to violate the nature of the partner; and thus, sex presupposes love to be engaged in in a *human* way.

Since sex needs love in order to be consistent, then marriage presupposes actual love of the couple for each other.

Fortunately, there is an aspect of the sexual drive that disposes one toward loving the other person. The sexual drive tends to make a person notice what is good and attractive about the other person *as a*

person and tends to blind one to the other's less noble qualities. Thus, one tends to think of a person one is in love with as a paragon, and to feel quite humble in relation to him.

Thus, even though the satisfaction of the emotions connected with the act of sex tends to be selfish, the sex drive looked at as a whole tends toward a predisposition in favor of respect for the other person as a person, or toward actual love. Even if this were not so, love would be presupposed in marriage, however.

Therefore, polygamous marriages are morally wrong.

That is, marriages of many wives to one husband (polygyny) or many husbands to one wife (polyandria), subordinate the personhood of the people on the multiple side to the personhood of the single partner. It would be a sophism for a man with two wives, for instance, to say that he is "sacrificing his own notion of what is good to theirs." To which one's? Each of his wives will have her own ideals; and the man cannot adopt both; hence, one will be "the favorite," and the other will not have the respect she deserves.

It also follows that it is immoral to get married for the sake of one's own fulfillment.

It is also folly to do so. Marriage is *not* for one's *own* gain, but for the sake of the *other* person. It must be the other's fulfillment that is *more* important than one's own; and marriage is not a kind of "fifty-fifty" thing where the intention is "I'll help you if you help me." The reason is that if this is the attitude, then it becomes a kind of economic-type relationship, and the love aspect of it is lost. Each person keeps *his own* notion of what is good and simply yields to the other insofar as there is reciprocity.

But in an intimate relationship that lasts for years, this clash of notions of "good" that are retained eventually is recognized as a fundamental incompatibility of values, which makes it impossible to continue living together.

Hence, there must be the willingness to give up one's values and adjust them to the reality of the partner, or the marriage will tend to

contradict itself.

This does not mean that one cannot predict happiness from marriage; it is just that one's own happiness must not be the goal for which one chooses to marry.

The reason why it is possible (and likely, if the marriage is entered consistently with its reality by both partners) that one will be happy being married is this:

One's motive is the happiness of the other person. But in a good marriage, the other person loves one; therefore, the other person becomes happy by one's own fulfillment. Hence, in a good marriage a person acts to fulfill himself, *not* for his own sake, but *because this is the best way to make his partner happy*.

One also acts for one's partner's fulfillment, of course, and does not stand in his way. Hence, there is happiness at seeing the other person fulfill himself as well as the satisfaction of fulfilling oneself for the satisfaction of the other person.

The best of both worlds, in other words.

Note that this particular multi-layered happiness comes *only if one's intention is giving up seeking one's happiness for its own sake*. If this is not done, the goal-seeking of each partner *interferes* with that of the other, and they must *defer* to the other, respecting the other's *rights*. In a true marriage, rights do not really enter into the motivation, because one is interested in *subordinating oneself to the goals* of the other person, not simply being careful not to violate the other's nature.

Even if the marriage is less than ideal, the attitude of love makes being "used" unimportant to one; and many difficult times are got through this way.

Since marriage presupposes actual love, then there is no authority in marriage.

It used to be held that in "conjugal society" (marriage), the man "by nature" had the authority, because the man was stronger and

more aggressive. But authority has nothing to do with physical strength or aggressiveness. Authority, remember, is basically *the right to command and punish*; and since commanding means telling another what the other must do, the characteristic which would give a person “natural” authority would be *wisdom*, not strength.

But neither sex has by nature more wisdom than the other, because “degrees” of wisdom depend on how much information one can be conscious of at one time (so that one can understand more or less complex relationships); but this limitation of brain-capacity is not sexually dependent. Hence, neither sex has anything by nature which would give it authority over the other.

Further, if marriage presupposes actual love, authority is not *needed*, because authority exists to motivate non-fulfilling behavior on the part of those who are basically self-interested. But in marriage, the partners are interested in the other person primarily, and will therefore tend to want to do what the other wants, and do not need to be threatened to do so.

Hence, it is morally wrong for one partner to presume to give orders to the other and impose sanctions for disobedience.

This, of course, does not mean that there is not leadership in a marriage. But which of the partners is the leader depends on which has the greater wisdom and ability to persuade, not on maleness or femaleness. And, in fact, throughout history women have been the actual leaders in many if not most marriages, whatever their legal position.

Of course, the notion that men had authority over their wives led to many abuses of the personhood of women, even by men acting in good faith. It is time for the theory behind this to be revealed for the sophism it is.

Since marriage involves sex, and sex tends to produce children, marriage naturally tends to evolve into the family. I suppose it would be well to begin this section with a restatement of something I said earlier:

Beware the fallacy that “every child should be a wanted child.” It sounds plausible; but it is quite possibly that attitude that has been responsible for the increase in battered children. The reason is that when a couple “wants” a child, they are thinking of how “fulfilling” having a child would be; and children are rarely fulfilling to the parents—they tend to be the opposite. Parents, then, “wanting” children, are unprepared for the fact that children force many many restrictions on parents’ own goal-seeking; and they tend to resent the demands and the nuisance children are, once the newness has worn off. And then they take it out on the kids.

The common goal of the family is to provide the opportunity for the children to grow up into adults who can utilize as far as possible their self-determination.

The childrens’ development, then, is the common goal of the family as a society; and the parents have the obligation of adjusting their lives to this goal; and if it means giving up or postponing careers, then this is the way things are.

It is morally wrong for parents to seek their own self-development at the expense of the development of the children.

That is, if there is a choice between parents’ advancement where the children have less of a chance to develop or the children’s greater development at the expense of missed opportunities for the parents in their careers, then the parents’ development is the one that is to yield.

The reason, of course, is that the parents have caused the children to begin to exist, and therefore have to take the consequences of their action. The children did not ask to be born; it is the parents’ action which produced them; and therefore, the parents have no right to expect the children to be subordinate to their own development.

This does *not* mean that parents may not make their children do things; because children have to be taught that they have obligations and must make contributions to societies they are in, without necessarily receiving any compensation for their service. *But this sort of thing may be done because it prepares the children for adult life, not*

because children are handy labor-saving devices for parents.

(Any parent knows anyway that it is twice as much work to make the kids do something as it is to do it yourself.)

Parents have authority over their children, and may (and in general must) command them and punish them when they disobey.

The reason is that children think abstractly and are not concretely aware of the consequences of their acts (or believe that by wishing the consequences not to occur, they will not). Hence, they cannot for a long time make—or be expected to make—rational choices. Parents, then, have the obligation of *forcing* them to do what is concretely rational, based on the parents' knowledge of consequences, so that the children will not unwittingly do themselves damage.

Parents have *joint* authority over their children.

That is, *each* parent, who was *fully* responsible for their being a child (since each one could have prevented the act that caused it), therefore has *full* authority over the child. The authority is not divided half-and-half, nor is it vested in one or the other parent and “delegated” to the other one. A command from one parent is *just as much to be obeyed* as a command from the other. This follows, of course, from the fact that neither partner in the marriage has authority over the other one.

And what follows from this is that

It is morally wrong for one parent to countermand a command of the other, unless he clearly sees that the command would be damaging to the child if obeyed. A command by either parent must stand and be supported by the other parent, even if he does not agree with it.

Not to do this is to act as if you have the authority and your partner either doesn't have it or has it on sufferance from you, both of which are false.

Even if one parent commands something that violates a right of the child (does him damage), the releasing of the child from obedience has to be done in such a way that the child does not get the

impression that he can disobey when he feels like disobeying or must come running to the other parent to see if it is all right to obey.

Parental commands should not seem arbitrary to the child, but it must also be clear that the reason the child has to obey is the authority of the parent, not the cogency of the reasons.

The reason for this is that the child must learn the difference between commands and good advice. If commands are given in such a way that the attempt is to *persuade* the child by the reasons for the action, then this reduces the commands to the level of advice, and prevents the child from learning that what gives *commands* their force is not their wisdom but the sanctioning power of the authority.

At the same time, since commands in society have to be consistent with the common goal and the common good of the society, then the child is to be given reasons for the command to show that the command itself should be reasonable, even though the motivating force is not solely the reasonableness of the command.

Parents must punish children for violations of their commands.

If they don't actually carry out the sanctions, the commands lose their force as commands, and once again degenerate into advice; thus preventing the child from learning the hard lesson that in society one must do what is not "reasonable" in the sense of "personally advantageous," and that not to do so is to incur penalty from the society.

Parental authority diminishes as the child grows up and eventually ceases when the child gets into a position to be able to choose his own life.

A child turns into an *adult* when society in general passes from *helping him develop himself* to *expecting him to contribute to the society*. Thus, the self-development of an adult is his own business, and is irrelevant to the society. Instead of *helping* an adult develop himself, the society simply *does not hinder* self-development. But the adult also becomes a *full member* of the society, and thus the society now expects cooperative acts from him.

When this occurs varies from culture to culture and person to person. In some cultures, this happens right at puberty (usually signalled by some sort of ceremony). In our culture, when a person finishes going full-time to school (and is in a position to work full-time), then he is an adult. Even people in their twenties, therefore, who are going for Doctorates and are working part-time are not yet fully adults in our culture (though they are close enough as makes no difference). But undergraduates in college are still children, because society has no expectations of non-self-fulfilling conduct from them; and therefore, parents still have some authority over them. Obviously, when adulthood occurs is not something that is fixed by nature, but depends on social expectations, and so may legitimately vary from culture to culture.

The family ceases to exist as a society when the last child becomes an adult.

This does not mean that there is not a loving relationship among the members of what used to be the family, nor does it mean that adult children must leave home. What it means is that (a) parents *no longer have a moral obligation* to subordinate their own self-development to that of their children, but simply not to hinder their self-development; and (b) that children *no longer have a moral obligation to obey* their parents, but only the obligation to *respect* them (as causes of their beginning to exist).

When an adult child lives at home, then, his *reality* is that of a boarder, though, of course, he is still loved by his parents. They may set rules for what is to be done in their house; but this is not because they have any authority over him as parents, but because the house is theirs and he is their guest. If he doesn't like the rules, he is free to move out; in which case, the parents cannot morally try to control his life.

This finally ends the quotations from *Human Conduct*, dealing with the limits beyond which it is wrong to go in matters sexual.

But Christianity doesn't deal with avoiding contradicting reality;

it deals with acting in accord with the way things are—not with finding out how far you can go without sin, but in finding out what we really are, and how we can go along with and develop reality: help it be as fully as possible what it is and can be.

What this means is that we will have to delve even deeper into the nature of sexuality and the societies it implies.

The phenomenology of sexuality

A great deal has been written on Christian marriage, and I think a great deal of it has missed the point, because it tends to begin by the assumption that the home is a sort of monastery, and then tries to adapt an essentially Religious view to the realities of the lay situation. What I want to try to do is consider love and marriage, not as a way of being holy “though involved with sex,” but as they are in themselves, and then try to see how a layman can, by adopting God’s viewpoint, transform this state into what it truly is.

It is interesting to note, first of all, that sex is a rather ingenious device on the part of God to use one of man’s most powerful means of *self*-gratification as a vehicle to draw his attention away from himself. It need not have been this way; reproduction need not have required sex, still less caring for another person. Some lower forms of life reproduce without sex; and it is not inconceivable that higher forms could have evolved so that they do the same, or have a kind of impersonal sex like the plants. In fact, one would be inclined to think that autoreproduction would have a greater survival-value than the necessity of an organism’s finding another of the same species but opposite in sex in the same vicinity. This is one of the pieces of evidence that to me tips the balance in favor of evolution’s not being really an accident.

In fact, as we consider the various phases of the lay life, I will be pointing out that the world seems to be so constructed that it contains a number of very strong tendencies in the direction of

self-forgetfulness, even in what seems to be most selfish. Every aspect of life, it seems, if you push it hard enough, is really only consistent with itself if its selfless dimension is paramount. This, of course, is what you would expect if God really creates the universe out of love.

But be that as it may, the fact is that human sexual attraction carries with it the tendency for the lover to become interested in someone else, and to lose to some extent his interest in himself; and thus it is quite possible to be significantly Christian without giving up sexuality.

If we look at “falling in love,” which is the beginning of the phase of life we are interested in, it seems to me that the experience has three distinct aspects to it, as a psychological phenomenon: first, a physical-emotional aspect; secondly, an aesthetic experience based on the emotions involved; and thirdly, something that can only be called a mystical dimension—though it is a familiar sort of mysticism, one that is apt to go unnoticed, or, when noticed, to be inflated into something much greater than it is in its rather prosaic, though unintelligible, reality.

Interestingly enough, the physical aspect of being or falling in love is abstract, even though at first sight it seems most concrete. It has, however, as its object “the other sex,” and is pretty much the same no matter who it attaches itself to, just so this person be what is considered “attractive.” It is this aspect of being in love that is promiscuous, just because this aspect of it is abstract; and it is those who regard human love as nothing more than biological (however much more it may seem to be) who see nothing against sharing one’s sexual life with as many persons as one is attracted towards.

But these people are wrong, because there is something about the sexual drive that concretizes this urge and humanizes it; it fixes it on some person who may or may not be very attractive physically; and it is here that the aesthetic and mystical side of sexual love become evident. One begins to seek out persons to marry with a different

attitude from the physical attraction: one tries to find the kind of *person* he would like to live with.

But even here, the search is for an abstraction: a certain type of person. The odd thing is that it is very common to find someone who more or less fits the category, and suddenly to discover that the physical attraction follows this intellectual investigation as to who could be one's partner, to find that somehow this single person is the "right" one, the one that makes the other possible choices irrelevant, the one that unites the mind and the body rather than dividing them.

Up to this point, the person who has passed through puberty has been split apart from himself, torn away from what reason would have him do. When he meets the one reason says is the "right kind of person" and then falls in love, he begins to think that wholeness is possible.

It is this union of the intellectual and emotional that is the aesthetic side of the experience of love, because fundamentally an aesthetic experience (the experience of being confronted with beauty—as opposed to attractiveness) is a *meaning* grasped through emotions. It is a real meaning, not simply the emotions themselves, because one understands a *relationship*, but it is a meaning that is grasped through the relation of *emotions*, and not the relation of sights or sounds. Thus, it is a different kind of meaning from ordinary meaning.

For most people, since the emotions connected with sex are extremely powerful, and yet are related to all kinds of different experiences, the experience of being in love is the most significant of all aesthetic experiences. It is this that generates the desire to write poems and play music, and makes all the silly (and the not silly) love poetry make sense, where the truth of the universe seems to be summed up in the beloved, and "we know why the summer sky is blue," and all the rest of it.

And oddly, this turmoil brings peace, because the emotions of love, despite their violence, make sense finally. You understand what it is all

about; you and she were meant for each other.

But beneath this understanding, there is a non-understanding. Why is it that *this* person out of all the world should be the one? And this mystery is compounded by the discovery that not only is she the only one for me, but for some incomprehensible reason I have become the only one for her. It can't be coincidence; she could have fallen in love with many more attractive people than I am; but there is nothing about me that would single me out. Why?

The more a person focuses on the individual aspect of the other and oneself, the fewer reasons one finds, the fewer relations one discovers that make sense out of this—which itself makes sense out of so much. An intellectual attention paid to the individual *as unique* and as unrelated to other things is what the mystical experience essentially is. It is intellectual, and so it is not an emotional experience, nor is it a perception of some sort; but it seems to be a kind of knowing. But it is a knowing which is not understanding, because understanding knows relationships, and in this experience, one simply focuses the intellect on the individual without finding any relationship to understand. Thus, it is a knowing-unknowing, a mystery. It is like looking into absolute darkness, as down in a cave when they turn off the lights. The black expanse you see is seeing—but seeing nothing. Here, the experience is one of knowing—but knowing nothing. Those who are in love will know what I am referring to, as one aspect of their love: it is their knowledge of the “specialness” of the beloved, and the “specialness” of the love itself, even though they are aware that sexual love is one of the most common experiences of mankind.

In the beginning, however, the mystical aspect of love is not very strong, and is ordinarily overwhelmed by the physical and aesthetic aspects, precisely because the lover thinks he understands his beloved. He has put her into a category; and as acquaintance advances, his theory of her is ordinarily strengthened, because his emotions tend to make him pay attention only to those aspects of his beloved which would lead to his marrying her, and directs his attention away from

what does not suit his preconceived notion of the proper person to marry. But since understanding is just the awareness of relations among images or objects, and since the aspects of the beloved that are unfavorable are only dimly if at all perceived, then the beloved is understood as being practically perfect.

Love, therefore, in its initial stages is blind because it sees too little and understands too much.

This blinding by the emotions may, of course, be more or less severe; but its tendency is to carry the person away to some extent and make him want to commit himself to the beloved, because the more he sees her, the more impossible it becomes for him to conceive of a better choice for a partner. Coupled with this is the realization that this ideal (because idealized) being regards one in the same way, and one's resolve is strengthened, one begins to have more confidence in himself just because the one he respects so highly has a high opinion of him—and yet at the same time there is a hesitation toward commitment based on the fear, not so much of making a mistake oneself, but that the beloved is being deceived by not paying proper attention to one's shortcomings, and may be tying herself down to someone very different from what she imagines.

Note that this aspect of the sexual attraction tends to make the lover more interested in the beloved than his own gratification; and in this way what is emotionally selfish cheats itself, as it were, and produces an abstract concept of the ideal being for whom it is worth while to sacrifice one's whole life. One feels very humble, because he feels he does not deserve the love and high opinion that the beloved has for him, though he rejoices in it; and at the same time, he tries to make himself "worthy" of her good opinion and live up to her (hitherto mistaken) idea of him. Remember, this works on both sides; but our pronouns have only one sex, and so we have to pick one or the other when discussing this.

Eventually, the committing decision is made; and then after the initial bliss of the honeymoon, the situation changes. The mutual

commitment eases the tensions of courtship, and the gratification of physical desire lessens the degree of the emotions felt between sexual contacts. Marriage brings peace, the sense of wholeness, and relaxation. The lover feels at ease with the beloved, as he did not before marriage, and the less noble aspects of his character begin to show themselves once again as he relaxes his attempts at impossible sanctity. It is possible to live a perfect life, but only for a short time; and the difficulty is compounded when you feel comfortable. Thus, both partners revert, to some extent, to being themselves.

But then, as the beloved shows herself to be less than perfect, and as the lover's emotions exert less control over his perceptions, then the lover realizes (usually with a shock) that he didn't marry the person he thought he was marrying.

Still, he thinks he understands what the beloved "really is," or at least the possibilities of the "real true self" that reveals itself now as bare possibilities and not the actualized reality he thought existed. Now the impulse of the lover is to "help" his beloved achieve these possibilities, and become once again the ideal being he married.

This is unselfishness; the lover at least thinks he is doing this "for her sake," not for anything he gets out of it. But it is actually a disguised form of self-centeredness. What the lover thinks is the "true reality" of the beloved is *his abstract ideal of what she "ought" to be*. That is, his idea of what she "really is" is a *goal* he has constructed for himself of what she can develop into; and so he is really imposing his goal on her, and trying to make her over into his notion of what she is.

But the essence of a human being, within the limits imposed by one's genes and past choices, is to be *self-determining*; which, as I have said so often, means that there is no objective goal for the person, no objective "true reality"; that the goal is *what the person himself chooses to be the goal*; there is no meaning to what the person "ought" to be except what the person chooses.

Thus, this attempt by the lover (and remember, this is occurring

on both sides at once, because each is both lover and beloved) is actually a contradiction of the true essence of the beloved. This “understanding” is an imposition of a false notion on the reality, and a taking away of the other’s freedom, making the beloved a slave of the lover’s notion of what is “good for” her.

Now of course, since the beloved is the lover of the lover, she does try to go along with these attempts to make her over; but there is bound to be resentment connected with it, because it *is* a denial of her self-determining reality, and further, the more a person tries to live up to the other’s notion, the more the other finds new faults that “need to be corrected” before the ideal is reached; and the task becomes an impossible one. Not to mention the fact that this perfectionist is not so perfect himself, and if he would only get rid of this or that little defect “which really makes no difference but it bothers me so much,” then even if he is exacting, life could be much easier.

At this stage, then, each person sees himself as being imposed upon by the other’s unrealistic demands that he be a saint, and at the same time is unaware that he is making the same kinds of demands (usually not in the same way; the verbal criticizer is countered by the partner’s not complaining, but showing disapproval in silent ways).

Then each partner finds that nothing pleases the other. Things that he used to do which the fiancée took great pleasure in, he finds that she doesn’t really like, and now sometimes even resents. He thought he understood her, at least that he knew what she liked; now he doesn’t even know that.

He still loves her, but he finds it more and more difficult to express this love in a way that will make the beloved happy; and so he passes from knowing all about her to discovering that he knows nothing about her—and at the same time being convinced that she knows nothing whatever about what he really is, or she wouldn’t be making these unreasonable demands and misinterpreting what he does with the best of intentions.

This is a normal stage of love. As it develops, the couple seems to

be growing farther and farther apart, and it becomes more and more apparent to them that they are really incompatible. This is the point at which divorce is contemplated, and is one of the reasons why it should not be allowed; because it is the point at which true love can begin.

Usually there are children by this time, and they are young, which is lucky, because they evidently need both parents and would be torn in two by a separation. So some form of accommodation is needed simply in order to survive. Either one or both of the partners (they don't arrive, unfortunately, at this stage together) then decide that, instead of trying to adapt the other person to the abstract ideal formed of her, they will adapt *their own* life to the actual, imperfect, perhaps perverse, reality that confronts them.

And this, which seems to be a purely practical decision forced on a person by the circumstances, is actually the first step in that long road to true sexual love, which is the subordination of oneself to another's actual reality and a letting of the other person have her own goals, making her actual goals one's own. Letting her be herself, in other words, rather than "helping" her be her "true self." The second seems like love and is actually covert selfishness (and is sometimes what the Christian books on marriage say that married love ought to be), and the second seems like despair and is what married love is really all about.

That is, married love is *not* changing the beloved into a "better person"; it is changing *oneself* into a *different* person to adapt oneself to life with the beloved.

This seems, as it works itself out, to be a case of "parallel lives," without the "togetherness" that goes with "true intimacy"—and it can be that. But this letting of the other person go does not mean a loss of interest in her; it simply means a letting the other person be herself, and caring about her because she *is*, not because she is *this or that*. You don't love the beloved for her "qualities," still less her "good qualities," but she is—whatever she is—and you are, and the

two of you are together.

Christianizing sexuality

This is a very brief sketch of some of the aspects of the reality of sexuality as it appears in human consciousness. The Christian's job as a layman is to use sexuality consistently with what it is, irrespective of his own advantage or lack of advantage: to help his sexual life reach what it contains potentially.

Let me now try to trace what this might mean, from the beginning of having sexual attraction through falling in love, getting married, and so on.

First of all, the Christian would be interested in remaining a virgin before marriage, not simply because sexual activity outside of marriage is self-contradictory for one reason or another (as mentioned in the section on morality), but because the revelation to one's marriage partner that her lover has "saved himself" for her in spite of the strength of the urge is one of the most significant wedding presents one can give.

We are, however, weak, and it is possible for one with a Christian orientation to lose his virginity, and be experienced in sex before marriage. The Christian who has had this happen to him is not going to regard it as a disaster, as if he has "ruined everything"; his sexuality will not be all that it otherwise could have been, now; but what is done is done, and the Christian does what he can with the reality he has, without repining over what could have been.

The Christian will not be afraid of contact with members of the opposite sex, as if they were "occasions of sin." Christianity is not an avoidance of sin—though, of course, one takes reasonable precautions not to court situations in which it is *likely* that one will lose control. But the generalized sexual attraction is not evil; and in fact, the putting of oneself into proximity with the opposite sex, in situations where the attraction is there, but there is little likelihood of carrying

it to the point of sexual intercourse, is a kind of asceticism that is proper to the lay state. I am referring to things like dances, where a boy and a girl hold on to each other and are very close to each other, and so on, but where they are in public, and the possibility of having sexual intercourse is remote. The attraction is definitely there, and it can be strong; but it is generally not so strong that it is translated into action. Thus, one realizes that he can control the urge, that the urge itself is not bad, and at the same time he is learning about the opposite sex and not having it some mysterious and dangerous “something” that must be avoided until the last moment.

If there is no reason to believe that either yourself or your partner (and at this stage, there is not only nothing wrong with many partners, but it is consistent with the nature of sexuality here, which is learning about the opposite sex as such) will be led into sexual intercourse, then the Christian can enjoy fully this phase of his sexuality, and can mingle the sexual attraction to others with the ability to be friends with those he is attracted to.

I might point out here that the business of “going steady” at a young age is an attempt, largely through fear, to skip over this generalized aspect of sexuality. One finds a person one can “relate to,” and rather than experimenting with the sexual attraction, one attaches one to this friend in a more or less permanent way, because trying to relate to other people is demanding or frightening.

The Christian has nothing to be afraid of from his sexuality; God made it, and God made it that strong; and if you can’t control it by yourself, you and God can. And if you should fail, inadvertently go too far, it is not the end of the world. There is an aspect of sexuality that is pre-marital and not directly related to marriage; and while this aspect of sexuality is not all there is to it, to leap over it and to begin walking—so to speak—before you have learned to crawl is not to recognize the whole phenomenon for what it is. It is permitted to have fun with members of the opposite sex, without any thought of marriage—even fun involved in touching and fondling—always

supposing that the situation is such that the touching and fondling will remain that.

I suppose this should also be added, since people nowadays are so uninhibited sexually. Sex is not something that is, shall we say, “social,” and there are times when the kind of thing I was referring to in the preceding paragraph is inappropriate, however innocent it might be in itself. Kisses and embraces in school corridors may not be such that they lead to sexual intercourse; but they make a display for the public of something (a) that the public is not interested in, and (b) is in its fullness something that is intimate, and therefore *excludes* others. Sex, after all, does lead to an exclusive commitment between just two people, to the exclusion of all others. Hence, to make a public display of even the early stages is to use something essentially private as if you didn’t care whether others were in on it or not. If it’s none of their business what you do, why do you force it on their attention?

There is a balance to be struck at this stage, then, between keeping things so private that the caresses are likely to go on to actual sexual intercourse, and making a public show of the generalized attraction. The situations in which this balance occurs should be fairly clear; and given the situation, then enjoy yourself and don’t feel guilty.

But as a person gets into a stage of life where it could be reasonable to get married, this kind of sexuality develops into looking for a life-partner.

First of all, I would say that a Christian ought not to contemplate marriage until he is in a position to have a child immediately. The reason for this is that the act is complete when it results in a child, and to begin your sexual life by saying, “We can’t afford a child yet; let’s wait before we have one,”—even if the means for postponing a child are morally legitimate—is to learn the language of sexuality as if it did not involve a child; and the child becomes then psychologically a kind of side-effect of the act, not part of the true nature of the act itself. The contraceptive mentality is the carrying of this to its absurd and

self-contradictory conclusion. The point here is that if (by getting married) you are going to put yourself into a position of being able to perform the act, then let it be its *full* self at the beginning, so that you will realize in practice what it really is; and then *later* when you find that you must limit the number of children you have, you will *permit* the incompleteness, realizing that you have taken away some of the beauty of a thing that is beautiful in many many dimensions.

Now then, when sexuality becomes serious, the Christian will recognize that falling in love is going to blind him, and the beloved will seem to be perfect. Therefore, the Christian will use his head before he uses his heart and begin associating with the *kind* of people he could expect will make for a lasting relationship.

That is, it is possible for a king to marry a chorus girl and to be happy; it is possible, but not likely; and if one of the pair is happy, it doesn't follow that the other is going to be. It is possible for a Christian and a Jew to be happy together in a marriage; but if each is devout, this means that the Jew must not consider his partner to be a blasphemer (though that is what the partner is—to him), and the Christian must not consider the partner to be benighted; and so on.

I personally think that the racial problem in our society will not be solved before Blacks and Whites intermarry with the same ease that Italians and Irish do now. But the fact is that interracial marriages are also intercultural marriages; and an interracial couple must be very sure they have very strong interests in common (particularly religion), or they will find, to their shock, that things each took for granted as “perfectly natural” the partner thinks are “perfectly silly.” I speak as an American who married a South American. It is a dangerous thing; and one who does it should have his eyes open before he gets too involved.

And this is the point, of course. Knowing of the blinding effect of *being* in love, one uses one's eyes before *falling* in love; and then when one falls in love, one need not worry about the blinding.

Again, there is nothing really to worry about. One does what seems

to be the reasonable thing, praying for help to the Master; and the Master, who arranges everything to work out to what is good for those who love him, will see to it that no ultimate mistakes are made—that any mistake is better than what would have happened if the mistake had not been committed.

A Christian is not afraid to seek advice about potential partners. Christian love is not “affection,” still less letting one’s emotions carry one away. Christian love does not seek out difficulties because “the overcoming of them is the cross”; there will be difficulties enough, God knows, who is going to lead you gently into self-forgetfulness. You need not try to force his hand by making things as likely to fail as possible, expecting him to perform a miracle at the last minute.

It is not Christian, in other words, to marry an alcoholic with the idea of “reforming” him, or a homosexual with the idea of “leading him out of his habit.” Such marriages are doomed from the start, because the “improvement” of the other (i.e. the imposition of one’s own idea of “the good” on the other) is the goal, not the subordination of the self to the other’s *reality*. If a person is an alcoholic or a homosexual, his situation is a sad one; but he cannot, in general, be “led out” of it; and if a person tends to beat on you, avoid him; you cannot cure him, and may die trying.

Does this sound cold and not loving? True love is cold, since it respects the reality for what it is; affectionate love too often just wants to feel good—or worse, feel virtuous.

Having found someone who looks reasonably like a person who could be a lifelong partner, however, the Christian is not afraid to fall in love, to make the leap of faith that he can make his beloved happy, and she can make him happy; that when he marries, the person she will turn into combined with the person he will turn into will be even more compatible—in the long run, even in the very long run—than they are now.

Commitment to another person, who is changing, weak, and fickle,

is a dangerous thing. Jean-Paul Sartre was right, when he said that the best thing to do (if you want security) is to have others love you, but not to love anyone else. Even if the beloved really is all you think she is, she won't be this way long, because she's going to have to put up with you, and this is going to transform her; and then you're stuck for the rest of your life (or hers) with someone you didn't bargain on.

And this, of course, is why marriage involves love. You can't buy a lover the way you buy a car; you have to take something unknown, which may be nothing at all like what you expected; and once you take it, you can't turn it back. You have to *accept* it for what it is.

The divorce mentality denies this, and in fact is calling love "getting what you were looking for." It allows "shopping around" until you find what you really wanted in a partner: the one who fits your needs. But this, of course, is consumerism, not self-subordination. And it does not lead to happiness in marriage, but simply to satisfaction—even when the satisfaction is mutual. It is an economic relationship; I give to you and you give to me; and we're both satisfied.

But the love-relationship is, I *care* about you, and am not interested in my own satisfaction; you *matter* to me simply because you exist, whether I get any satisfaction from it or not.

Love is sacrifice; it is sacrifice of the self. If it is mutual, then there is gain; but for the lover, the gain is a bonus at which he rejoices, but is really not the point; if it were not there at all, he would still do what he did.

The Christianization of the act of sexual intercourse recognizes, first of all, that it is a kind of language between the two people. The very awkwardness and pain of the first act of sex between two virgins says, "I give you the gift of not knowing what to do, so that we can learn the language together." Neither is embarrassed, because each sees the other as awkward; neither need feel inferior. This, as I said, is a very great gift; far greater than the gift the experienced lover can

give his beloved, because the satisfaction he shows her also says to her, “See how I can please you, even if you can’t please me.” If this is the only gift you are capable of giving because you have lost your inexperience, then so be it; but virginity is a greater gift.

And of course, sex is an act of love in that one learns the kinds of things that please the partner; one learns by experimenting and noting breathing, body heat, heartbeat, and so on; and one adjusts one’s own activity to the kind of thing that gives greater satisfaction to the partner.

Human sex cannot be “natural,” the way animal sex is; we can’t just “let it happen” and it will turn out to be its full self. We must study. Even sex manuals to discover techniques one would not have thought of; but mainly, one must study one’s partner’s body language, to try to find what pleases.

Let me end this section by remarking that I realize I might have shaken some people by an apparently cavalier attitude toward sexual sin, as if I didn’t consider it serious. Certainly it is serious; any sexual sin is serious, because it is acting frivolously with a faculty one of whose functions is to enable a new embodied spirit to come into existence. But the point is this: there is *no* sin, however grave in itself, which is the end of the world when committed, and which demands, after being committed, an attitude of horror at oneself and anguish before it can “really” be forgiven. Once it is done, then all that is needed is a change of heart away from it, and forget it.

In this connection, a little-stressed point of the story of the Prodigal Son is instructive. The father did *not* require the son to “make up” in *any* sense for his crime of spending all his inheritance in sinful living; there was no “atonement” before the rings were put on his fingers, the best cloak on his back, and the calf slaughtered. The father did not care what he had done with the money, and did not ask him to “right the wrong” in any sense.

Hence, the Christian change of heart is not in itself something that involves “restoring the balance” disrupted by sin. (If one has done

damage to another person, of course, the *moral* law says that one must do what one can to restore the other person to his previous state.) But restoring the balance disrupted by *sin* is, if we knew it, impossible, because (a) the sin does not consist in the actual damage done, but in the self-contradictory and self-frustrating goal it implies in the sinner, and (b) as an eternal act, nothing we can do can remove it anyway and render us sinless. The act as a self-contradiction must simply be taken out of our lives by God—and so as such it is not something to get excited about, because God doesn't get excited about it.

Besides, this notion of the "horror" of serious sin, which is supposed to motivate us to avoid it has, in addition to its not being God's attitude, but the serpent's, the following interesting effect. If we consider the sin as "terrible" and to be avoided at all costs, then when we *do* fall, we tend to say, "But I am a decent person, and so the sin mustn't have been really a sin after all. Could I—I—have done a thing that the very angels shrink from contemplating? Of course not. So that kind of thing is not really bad."

And the result is that we redefine the sin into a kind of virtue. No the sin is what it is; but if we commit it, as we might, then let us admit that the sin is a sin, beg forgiveness, and go on with our renewed lives and enjoy ourselves again.

The second thing to remark is that Christianity is not a state of moral virtue, still less a *means* toward being more morally virtuous. The Christian is in favor of moral virtue, which is, of course, acting consistently with what one is; since the Christian loves reality with God's love, he is interested in acting consistently with it—of course. But this does not make the Christian "stronger," necessarily, than others, so that moral virtue is a *sign* that one is a good Christian, and Christianity is a help toward "holiness," meaning moral perfection.

The Christian is imperfect, sinful, and forgiven; the sin and the imperfection does not matter. Sexual sins are easy to commit, because the urge is so strong; because of this, of course, the sin, serious in

itself, is less serious because of lack of control. But what difference does it make whether the sin was “very deliberate” and therefore more serious, or “less deliberate” and therefore not really serious. This is interesting in theory, but God simply does not care about the degree of turning your back on him, or how many times you do so. His miracle of removing the sin from your life is available to you every time you want it; and if you need it once or a hundred times a year is of no consequence whatever to him. You are a sinner. You are rotten. If you think these statements are false, you are mistaken. If you realize they are true, so what? You are loved.

The Christian homosexual

How can there be such a thing as a Christian homosexual? There is no way to *practice homosexual sex* in a Christian way; but there are plenty of homosexuals who are Christians. The fact that homosexual sex is a sin is apt to give people the idea that “don’t do it, and fight against the tendency to do it” is all that needs to be said. It’s just a bad habit, after all, like any other.

This is the attitude above: that Christianity is a vehicle for achieving moral virtue. And it is only the heterosexual, perhaps, who can make the statement that ends the preceding paragraph. Any homosexual, from all the evidence, knows that it is not a bad habit like any other; it is an ingrained disposition that in all probability has been resisted with greater or lesser success for years and years (whether it was originally innate or acquired somehow) and instead of getting less, remains basically the same. Even those who do not think that there is anything morally wrong with homosexual sex do not set out to become homosexuals with the idea that being a homosexual is a desirable condition; if anything, there is too much social stigma attached to it. Anyone who finds himself homosexual has got that way at least to some extent in spite of himself.

The Christian is one who accepts reality for what it is. And the

Christian who is homosexual is one who accepts his reality for what it really is: not a moral horror, not a “perversion” (except in a certain sense), not a mental disease, but a spiritual handicap.

What is a handicap? A handicap is something about a person that makes it difficult or impossible for him to do what normal people have no trouble doing. Physical handicaps like blindness cut people off from a wide range of activities; mental handicaps like retardation cut those handicapped off from many activities that require complex reasoning or concentration.

Spiritual handicaps are tendencies toward acts that involve a contradiction with some aspect of one’s nature. For instance, alcoholism is a spiritual handicap: the alcoholic cannot drink without drinking himself into a condition where he can act but can’t control his actions—without getting drunk, which is a contradiction.

The homosexual, as I mentioned in the section on sexual ethics, cannot fulfill himself emotionally without contradicting the reproductive aspect of his sexuality.

Hence, the homosexual has to recognize that he is not in a position where he can completely fulfill himself emotionally. If he is “bisexual” and can have sexual intercourse to orgasm with one of the opposite sex, he can fulfill himself sexually—but this does not fulfill him emotionally. If he does not have sex with anyone, then this aspect of his sex drive is not fulfilled, even if he has friends who are homosexual, and even if he touches them and so on, without going on to actual sexual activity.

The homosexual can, however, achieve partial fulfillment of himself; and the attitude that you have to “fight against it” implies that *being* homosexual is itself evil, somehow, if not sinful, and is not simply a handicap that one has to be careful about—more or less as the alcoholic has to be careful around liquor that he doesn’t take the first drink. But just as the alcoholic doesn’t have to shun liquor “in case he might lose control” if he has no reason to believe he *will* lose control, and just as the heterosexual does not have to shun women as

a “danger to salvation” because he might lose control if he touched one, so the homosexual does not have to fight his nature and its tendencies just because his nature (whether innate or second nature) is defective.

The refusal to accept oneself as homosexual (because it is somehow “evil” in itself) has led to an enormous amount of misery among a large part of the population (ten percent of which, they say, is homosexual). It is certainly not desirable to be homosexual, any more than it is desirable to be blind. But the blind person works at learning to accept himself as blind and learn *what he can do* as blind, not what he *can't* do.

Unfortunately, there exist only two sorts of counseling given to homosexuals now: (a) concentrate upon what you can't do and devote your life to avoiding it or (b) accept yourself as homosexual and so fulfill your emotional urges sexually. Both are false and in fact anti-Christian, because neither accepts the world as God accepts it: for what it really is.

The homosexual *is* homosexual, as the blind man is blind; and he can accept himself as such and know what activities are open to him, and what are the limits to what he can morally do. He can perform the acts that are not self-contradictory without cringing that he is being “queer” when he holds hands, say, with another man, or even embraces one. This is a way homosexuals can express affection for one another; and if they have this affection, and if there is nothing morally wrong with expressing it this way, why shouldn't they? True, it is a danger; but so is a heterosexual's holding hands with a woman.

Now of course, the homosexual expression of affection can't lead anywhere (except to friendship), and the heterosexual's can lead to sexual fulfillment in the full sense. This is the handicap.

The homosexual can legitimately marry one of the opposite sex and have sex with her. But both parties to this arrangement must be clearly aware that this is a marriage with a spiritually handicapped person. As I mentioned above, no one should marry a homosexual

with the idea that the handicap will be overcome by the loving heterosexual relationship.

It will not. This must be accepted. It will not. A homosexual *might* be able to become heterosexual, but this will not *simply* be by entering into a loving heterosexual relationship. It involves therapy of the wisest sort, and there are precious few therapists nowadays who are willing to do anything other than advise homosexuals to go ahead with homosexual sex and suppress any guilt feelings about it.

Granted, miracles happen; but miracles must not be counted on. A person who marries a homosexual must accept that the homosexual will not be able to be satisfied sexually by her, and probably will not be able to satisfy her sexually. Further, the homosexual will always be attracted sexually to others of the same sex, and will need to express his affection for them—and this is a need, and a need that *cannot be satisfied* by the heterosexual relationship he has with his wife. Heterosexual sex for the homosexual is *emotionally* unnatural (though even for him it is not self-contradictory and so not morally wrong); it would be like homosexual sex for a heterosexual. Hence, the act of sexual intercourse for the homosexual will be *dissatisfying* and will perhaps only give fire to his homosexual attraction.

The married homosexual is handicapped in his marriage; and his wife (or husband, of course, if it is a lesbian) is married to a handicapped person.

Now there is nothing wrong with a person's marrying a blind person, and putting up with the handicap. So there is nothing *wrong* with a person's marrying a homosexual; but the Christian spouse of a homosexual will accept the situation (which she will not be able to understand), and will adapt to it.

And, of course, since the sexual urge is so strong, then the homosexual is apt to sin, particularly if he is not constantly fighting his tendency. Again, the danger of this, and the danger of sexual unfaithfulness if he is married, is not a reason why he must make himself miserable and avoid what is legitimate; Christianity is not a

means toward moral virtue.

And if he sins, then he does what any sinner does; repents and forgets it, and gets up and shoulders his cross again. His Christian spouse, recognizing his handicap, is not devastated by this unfaithfulness, because her spouse is handicapped, and she accepts him as such. This is not to condone the act; but, like the stumblings of a blind man, it is something to be loved, not something to be condemned.

Homosexuals get very little help in this world, and there doesn't seem to be anywhere to turn, either in this one or the next, if the homosexual is not to turn to those who do not think that there is anything wrong with homosexual sex.

Therefore, I want it to be known that when I die, and the miracle occurs that I am with my Master and able to do what I want for the world, then I will be available on the other side of the grave to any homosexual who is having difficulty with his homosexual problem. Ask me then, and I will do whatever I can for you; and I will be in a position to do much, thank God.

Christianizing marriage

Marriage is not coextensive with sex life, even with a perfect sex life; nor is the topic of Christian marriage exhausted with a discussion of Christian sexuality. Of course, books on Christian marriage talk about much more; but I think that a good deal of what is said confuses Christian love with that affectionate "loving relationship" which can be Christianized, but is not itself Christian.

Christian love for one's spouse is God's love: infinite respect for the true reality of the spouse. But the *true* reality is not an ideal; it is what is there at any stage of the marriage. All too often, God is pictured as an idealist, who has the saint in mind as the "really real" spouse, and who enlists the person as an "instrument" for helping that saint come

into existence. This is the serpent's idea of the true reality, not God's; it is thinking in terms of good and evil. Christian love is acceptance.

Let me do a little exegesis of a Biblical text: that of St. Paul to the "Ephesians" (which is probably to Laodicea, but let that ride), in Chapter 5 (I won't mention the verses; if you want to look it up, then you might have to read more than just the verses in question, which will be a good thing, because you'll see the context).

"Give way to each other out of respect for the Prince's authority. Wives are to submit to their own husbands as if they were the Master; because the husband is head of his wife more or less in the sense in which the Prince is the head of the community: he is the one who keeps the body safe. But in the sense in which the community listens to the Master, wives are to listen to their husbands in everything.

"Husbands, you are to love your wives in the same way as the Prince loved the community and surrendered himself for it, to make it holy by washing it with the bath of the water that has the sacred words said over it, so that he could set the community beside himself as something full of dignity, something holy and stainless, without any spot or wrinkle or anything of the sort. This is the way husbands ought to love their wives—as if they were their own bodies. When a man loves his wife, he is loving himself; and of course no one hates his own matter; he feeds and takes care of it, just as the Prince does for his community, because we are organs of his body.

"With this in view, a man is to leave his father and mother and attach himself to his wife, and the two will become one living body.' Something very profound is hidden in this; I mean the relation between the Prince and his community; but in its literal meaning it says that each of you must love his wife as being his own self; and the wife is to have respect for her husband."

This, particularly by feminists, is taken as the rantings of Paul, and is cavalierly dismissed. I think it deserves a serious look.

First of all, wives are to submit to their husbands *in the way the community submits to the Master*. Not in the way a slave submits to his

master, but in the way the Christian community submits to its Master. But how do we as Christians, submit to God? We do his will. And what is his will? Our own will. This is what I have been saying all along. God has no “plan” for us that we must carry out in spite of ourselves; he created us free for us to use our self-creativity as we please.

The difference between this and self-centeredness is that the wife, like the Christian, develops herself *out of love* for her husband, because she knows that his happiness consists in her fulfillment. Just as I develop myself, not because God has “given me talents and expects me to use them,” but because I love God who has given me talents, and I use them because I love the one who gave them to me, even though I realize that he will not be disappointed if I don’t use them; so the wife fulfills herself, not because her husband will be angry or disappointed if she doesn’t, but because he will be happy if she does.

Far, then, from a prescription to enslave, the “submission” Paul talks about is true emancipation. The feminist is emancipated—from enslavement by her husband, because she thinks the husband is using her for his own sake. The Christian wife is emancipated from any kind of slavery, but she does this through her husband, not against him.

And husbands are to love their wives *as the Prince loved the community*. But Jesus loved his people, first of all, by submitting to their reality, even to the extent that this submission brought about his death by people who mistakenly thought they were doing the right thing. Secondly, he submitted to the community as to his own body, which it is, because it lives with his life.

Now the wife does not really live with the husband’s life, and so this, as Paul says, is only an analogy. But the point is that if the husband loves the wife and has the *wife’s* goals for herself as *his* goals for her; then her reality as an independent person is in fact a part of his spiritual life; and in loving her this way, she in fact becomes his own reality. That is, if her goals as hers are also his goals (the effects he wants to happen from his choices), then part of his fulfillment is her

fulfillment; he is frustrated if she cannot achieve her goals for herself; and hence his reality depends on hers; she is part of his eternal reality.

So his love for her is not the love of a master for a slave; it is the love of one who submits to another, and who respects the other's independent reality.

Essentially, both work out to be the same thing in practice. Each sees the other's happiness in his own fulfillment, and each develops himself out of love for the other.

The point here is that Christian love of one's spouse is not "togetherness," but letting be. The "union" comes precisely out of the letting the other be herself, not by interfering but by being there to assist when needed. God answers prayers; he does not force himself on our attention "for our own good." Like a good waiter at a dinner, he is there when we need him, and in the background when we don't. He does not "check up" on us, but is by no means indifferent to us. He does inform us when what we are doing contradicts what we are; but what he does is inform, not persuade or cajole or push. If there is one thing God is not, it is "pushy."

Now this means that the Christian has to fight against his own notion of the spouse's "true reality," as well as his notion of how the spouse could make his own life easier. It is one thing to accept another person in spite of her faults, and another to accept her with her faults, so that her faults become properties and are not faults. That is the goal of Christian sanctity in marriage, because it is the epitome of love of another as God loves.

And as to what is to be done, the burden is light and the harness fits easily. First, the course of action that seems to bring about the greatest objective benefit is the one a person would take, whether the benefit comes to the self or the spouse. If the benefit is to the spouse, the lover is happy doing it, because she is benefitted; if the benefit is to the self, the lover is happy because the spouse will be happy at his benefit.

That is, to reject the more reasonable course of action because it

benefits oneself more than the spouse is not Christian; it is what Auguste Comte called “altruism,” where the other is the *only* “real” reality. That kind of self-sacrifice is *lack* of respect for oneself, whom God loves infinitely, and consequently is lack of respect for God. This rejecting of the more reasonable course because of the benefit of another *is* love, but it is not *Christian* love. Christian love is not “altruism”; it is respect for reality, including one’s own.

Obviously, however, this adoption of the “more reasonable” course of action is to be undertaken simply by oneself only in trivial matters; in anything that makes a real difference, the refusal to consult one’s spouse is an imposition of one’s own values upon the spouse, assuming that she will take as the “more reasonable” course the same one one has chosen. But “more reasonable” in this context means “better”: what leads to a goal that is “more important.” But as I have said so often, there is no real objective “better,” or “more important,” because these deal with ideals, not facts. Hence, what is the more reasonable course of action to one spouse is not necessarily the more reasonable to the other. Therefore, some sort of accommodation must be reached.

But how is this done? By deferring to the other. Each spouse should be willing to consider the other’s values as values that can override one’s own—always supposing that the other’s values don’t involve a contradiction (as when the other thinks that something morally wrong is all right—as, for instance, if the wife, not realizing that anything is wrong with it, wants to use contraceptives or even wants an abortion. You can’t defer to her values in a case like this.)

Generally speaking, the two partners will not be alike in wisdom; and which one has the greater wisdom will be evident to both, whether or not it is explicitly stated. The one whose wisdom is generally greater, then, will listen to the other, because one can always be wrong; but the one with lesser wisdom will be more ready to give in, having once discussed the matter.

When one of the partners is adamant, whatever the wisdom of the

matter, the other will be ready to give in. What, in the last analysis, does it matter? That the wiser course of action be in fact taken, with the other dead against it, or that the more foolish act be taken and both partners happy? What is done passes; what is chosen is eternal.

There is an enormous amount that could be said on this subject, I suspect, if one were to spell out all the implications of what I have mentioned above. But this is supposed to be a preface to the lay life, not an exhaustive treatise on it: something to point the way, not something to put every yellow brick in the road.

I am not going to say anything about Christian parenting, except to mention that the Christian parent respects his children for what they are: persons, but persons not yet in a position to exercise their freedom rationally—but developing toward that state. What to *do* based on this respect can be found in child-care books (which are often a good deal less sloppy than books on Christian marriage); these acts are Christianized by the attitude of respect for the reality that is there.

And that is the point, really. Christianity is a question of attitude, not a question of what you do. The attitude of divine respect is complex as it works itself out into action; it is all too simple to *do* what is hard and think that because it is hard it is God's will in this vale of tears. It is complicated to enjoy life—to enjoy reality for what it is—because this means *seeing* things in a new way, though the actions themselves are easy and even pleasant.

The “Christian witness” that this phase of life provides, then, is that Christians, taking over God's attitude of infinite respect, not only for their partners and children but themselves, can enjoy every aspect of marriage and parenting in a way that the non-Christian cannot, consistently with his non-Christianity.

The Christian before marriage can enjoy sexual attraction and not be afraid of messing up his life if he sins; the atheist, if he is to be

consistent with his nature, must be concerned that the urge does not lead him to do something inconsistent—because he knows of no salvation, once he has been immoral. If he is to enjoy himself freely, he must (as so many do nowadays) try to pretend that things sexual are not really what they are, and that “mistakes” are just social faux pas, and are not “really” dishonest.

The Christian contemplating marriage can make the leap of faith with confidence in God that he will be able to live up to his commitment. The non-Christian has no one to be confident in but himself and his partner.

The Christian wife or husband is not interested in satisfaction, but in the other’s fulfillment, in the Master, and is capable of letting go and not trying to subordinate the other to his idea of her “real self.” The non-Christian must put up with things as they are also; but finds this not fulfilling; and if he is, in the last analysis, all that matters, how can this be happiness?

And at the end of life, the Christian knows that his beloved, who is still a very real part of his reality, is a living person, now with everything she chose as her goal—and in fact, everything she was willing to accept, as well as living the Divine life of infinite happiness; and the Christian knows that he is present to her, and she will be present to him eternally. “You may have died; you have only begun to exist.” He knows that she is now the plant that was produced by the seed she was when she lived with him, and that he will become a plant growing beside her in the Master’s garden.

The atheist, however, must face the dilemma that his present love for his dead wife is just as real and vivid as it was when she was with him—if not more so; but now (he thinks) he loves what does not exist; he loves only his image of her. But since the love is the same, was not his love for her all his life only his love of his experience of her, and not her real self? He thought he cared for *her*; but his present “caring” seems to be saying that he really only cared for his consciousness of her. Love has turned into a sham; he never loved her;

he only loved his love of her.

But he can't believe this; and so his life cannot be reconciled into something that makes sense.

And he looks at the Christian, and says, "If only it were true! Life could make sense if it were true; but it's too good to be true; life is really hell, and these people make it out to be something beautiful."

And if he sees the Christian's life making real sense, he might say, "But why can't it be true? If Jesus came back to life after dying, then it might be true. Did he really come back to life? Can life make sense? Can I be saved from my hell—the hell I made for myself?"

The Christian preaches, in other words, by living. And Christian marriage is perhaps the greatest preaching there is; but it is simply by loving one's partner and children as God loves, not by being "virtuous," that the preaching occurs.

It is the attitude, not the actions, that makes the Christian. What you *do* can be found in books of morality (at least what you avoid); but the point is to see things differently, not to follow a set of guidelines.

Chapter 5

The Layman and his Money

The poverty beatitude

After toying with the idea of starting this chapter, like the last one, with an analysis of economic ethics, I decided against it, for several reasons. First of all, the ethical dimension of the use of money is not subject at the moment to quite so horrendous a set of variations as that of sexuality: we know, basically, that to cheat is wrong and to use the power of money to force others into less-than-human conditions is wrong; the questions lie not in the basics, but in the nuances of applications of this general principle. And the second reason for leaving the ethics alone, except in passing, is that, once you get into the nuances, the whole issue becomes enormously complicated, involving critiques of capitalist and Marxist economics, which need books, not chapters or parts of chapters. The third reason is that I do have a book on the subject, *The Moral Dimension of Human Economic Life*, which can be consulted if anyone is interested in what I think on the matter.

For reasons that I hope will emerge as I continue, I think there might be said to be two counsels of Jesus with respect to money: “Go sell what you have and give to the poor,” which defines the attitude of the Religious life, and “make friends with sinful property (the ‘mammon of iniquity’),” which I will take it is the source of what I think is the lay attitude.

Let me distinguish the three different attitudes toward money briefly first. The Religious, seeing everything in relation to God, and recognizing that money is in essence power over the services of others, repudiates that control over others' lives altogether and relies for material assistance on the bounty of God as expressed in the love of others. The priest or clergyman, interested in showing the supreme value of the Kingdom, has the kind of attitude St. Paul had in Second Corinthians: "I'm still not going to charge you for anything; I want you, not your money. Parents should provide for their children, not children for their parents; it gives me pleasure to spend for your souls until I have nothing left."

But the layman, taking over God's creative attitude, tries to look on money for what it is, and help it to be what it is. He is not going to use money for his own benefit, exactly—for what it does for him—he is going to use it in such a way that it can develop its full potential. And this will not necessarily mean giving it all away.

But the first beatitude is poverty, isn't it? I think this is the place to begin the discussion of the layman and the lay attitude toward money. There are a number, I think, of errors in interpretation of the Beatitudes in general and this one in particular that need to be cleared up before we can look at the issue squarely.

In the first place, as is clear from Luke's version of the beatitudes, that what Jesus is talking about is real, actual poverty, suffering, and misery—*not* things that are desirable in themselves. Why then does he call people who are experiencing these things "blessed"? "Blessed" here does not mean what we think of by the word—blissful. The way it should be translated is this: "It is good for or a blessing for people to be poor (Matthew adds "in spirit"), because then they are under heaven's rule."

As I understand this, what Jesus is saying is that it is a good thing to be poor because then we have a chance of not seeing this life as the be-all and end-all of things. This is why it is also good to suffer, and

(to use the modern way of putting it) to be oppressed. It is precisely *because* these are bad that they are good for us; they take us away from this life, and make us realize that we don't matter—and so it makes it possible for us to let someone slap us on the other cheek, to give the thief our shirt after he takes our coat, and so on. It is not that we should *court* these things, but that we should have the attitude of not being of any importance to ourselves, that is the point here.

Why does Matthew add “in spirit” to “poor”? I think because simply *being* poor is not necessarily what Jesus was calling a good thing. Matthew, after all, was a tax-collector, and he would have seen that there are people who are poor who resent their condition bitterly and envy the rich, and who are prepared to engage in revolutions and killings to “get what they deserve to have.” This, *pace* “Liberation Theology,” is in my view anti-Christian.

I think what Matthew was referring to by being poor “in spirit” is not seeking something called “spiritual poverty” in the midst of wealth, but the kind of attitude so many poor people have who are poor and do not realize that they are poor. That is, they have what they need to live, they are not particularly interested in having more, and are not worried about losing what they do have. The fact that others are rich does not cause resentment. This is not a Stoic “being above” poverty, exactly, still less a seeking of the hardships of poverty in order to be “detached” from “the things of this world.”

Now this detachment from things of this world is not wrong, and can be Christianized; and, in fact, it is part of the Religious attitude toward the world, which does not have the world as its goal, but sees the world in its relation to God. But the layman is involved in the world, cares about the world and has the things of this world as the object of his love; and so this kind of detachment may very well not be appropriate for him. Hence, poverty “of spirit” in the traditional sense of detachment is not necessarily a Christian virtue for the layman.

If you take poverty of spirit in the sense that being poor does not

cause envy or fretting, then this sense would apply to most of the Beatitudes: suffering has to be suffering “in spirit,” in the sense that the sufferer does not regard his suffering as an occasion to hate God who caused it; the meek person allows others to trample on his rights “in spirit,” in that he does not try to stand up for them; and the oppressed must be oppressed “in spirit” for the Beatitude to apply, since if he hates the oppressor, he belongs to this world, not the Kingdom.

But note that all these things are, so to speak, curses, not blessings. True, they are only curses if we think such things “ought not” to happen to us, and that can only come about if we succumb to the serpent’s temptation to look on things as good and bad—and it is in *that* sense, I think, that the poverty is to be poverty “in spirit.” It is not to be considered as *either* good or bad—when it happens to oneself.

The Christian and others’ poverty

Nonetheless, the Christian is a human being, and while he can legitimately allow such things to happen to himself, and not be particularly concerned about whether what is happening to himself is good or bad, the Christian cannot abdicate his humanity and consider these curses as neutral *for other people*.

That is, while more-than-normal restriction of my activities might be a matter of indifference to me (because I concern myself with what I can do, not with the fact that I cannot do what “the average person” can do); still, I cannot as a human being cooperate with forcing others into an abnormally limited situation. I cannot oppress others simply because I don’t care whether I am oppressed or not; I cannot make others poor because I don’t care whether I am poor; I cannot trample on others’ rights because it is of no consequence to me if others trample on mine.

To cooperate in forcing others into an abnormally limited situation

is to dehumanize them; and it is inconsistent with me *as a human being* to do this. Christianity is not, as I have so often said, a humanism; but the Christian does not cease to be a human being. And certainly the Christian, who has God's infinite respect for the reality that exists, will not contradict either his own nature as human or others' humanity. We love with Jesus' love, who is human as well as divine. Hence, even though the Christian does not look on things as good and bad, this does not mean he does not notice what is right and wrong, and avoid what is wrong.

Now what does this mean in practice for the Christian who is faced with the poverty of others?

First of all, it does *not* mean working "to right this wrong." A Christian may in fact work to get people out of poverty, which in fact rights the wrongs that are involved in poverty. But in Christianity, we are talking about attitude, basically, and "righting wrongs" (looking on things as bad and to be corrected) is the serpent's attitude, not the Christian one.

Secondly, the Christian's attitude in the face of poverty and even starvation *does not* mean a guilt-trip of the nature of "Here I am with more than enough and people are starving," as if the mere possession of what is humanly decent is wrong as long as there is one person who is deprived. God, remember, is not interested in eliminating evils in the world; if this were so, there would be none. Evils are a human way of looking at things, not God's way.

No, what the Christian attitude in the face of poverty is in the first place is one of not cooperating with the impoverishment of others, and alleviating their poverty to the extent that not to do so is to cooperate in their impoverishment.

This, of course, is minimally necessary for any human being faced with dehumanized conditions in others which he can eliminate. To refuse to do anything when no harm will come to yourself and your refusal does harm to others is to will the harm to others.

But once one gets beyond this minimum, it cannot be said that

one is equivalently willing harm to others if one does not help them; it would be self-contradictory to assert this, because the minimum is the level at which not helping is willing harm.

As I pointed out in *The Moral Dimension of Human Economic Life*, this minimum amounts to saying that the affluent do not have a right to that percentage of what they own whose mere possession is depriving others of the minimum necessary to live a minimally human life.

But what this percentage is cannot be known in practice by any person; and so it becomes the function of civil society to discover what the minimal needs of the indigent are, and how, using the Principle of Least Social Harm, the affluent are to be assessed to make their necessary contribution to these needs, and to tax them this amount.

Thus, on the assumption that civil society is making a reasonable effort in this direction, this moral duty is discharged by paying taxes.

Let me try to be clear on this, without re-writing the book I am referring to. I think there is good evidence that such a reasonable effort is being made in our country, and that the tax structure is such that no one need worry about whether, after paying taxes, he actually has no *right* to what he now owns because his ownership is a connivance in forcing others into starvation or other positively inhuman conditions.

That there are people in our society who are starving can be admitted and still the above is true. I will speak of this shortly. What I am getting at is that I think that in our country, it is absurd to say that with those not even really affluent paying over a third of their income in taxes, this is not enough and they *must* do more. There is no reason to feel guilty because you are living decently.

Secondly, the Christian attitude is not one of “compassion,” in the sense of a pity that sees the plight of the poor and does not *think* about what the situation is and what in practice can be done without dragging other evils in its train. It is very difficult not to sound like Scrooge when one treats this subject rationally; but it does not follow

that because Scrooge was grasping and selfish, his arguments have no validity.

The Christian is not a prey to his emotions, of which “compassion” is perhaps the most insidious, because it sounds like unselfishness. I know a woman who out of “compassion” fed fudge to a diabetic, who “craved it so much.” This is not Christian love. “Compassion” in this sense is a way of looking evils because of the emotion of empathy; and like all emotions, it tends to concentrate attention toward direct action, and away from consideration of facts, which are cold and abstract. The result often is action which is counter-productive, because it is the obvious thing to be done to alleviate the evil felt; but it does not address the actual situation.

The government, as I mentioned, has the primary obligation of finding out who is living an inhuman life because of inability to find the means to live a human one, and how much is needed to correct this condition. But in correcting the condition, a situation must not be created which causes an economic incentive to get into the situation of dependence on this activity of the government.

For instance, it is said (and I take the figures for the sake of the argument) that at least in some states, the assistance given to mothers with dependent children is more than the minimum that it costs to raise those children for a year. One can ask why the children should have the bare minimum when it is the mother or society which is at fault. Why should they suffer?

The problem, however, is that if more than the *bare* minimum is provided (however compassionate it may be to do so), then it becomes economically advantageous to have several children, because the more children you have, the greater the “profit” (income - cost) you get from it. Granted most mothers do not have children for the sake of the tiny monetary “reward” for having them; but the point is that this sort of thing makes it *objectively advantageous* to go on welfare and have no husband and many children; and the government must not create such a temptation. We have no idea how strong it can

be for those who have practically nothing any way they look on their lives.

Further, the affluent must not be *forced* by the government (which exacts taxes under penalty) to do more than what is *necessary*. This is to make necessary what is not necessary, and government can only justify taking money from those who have it on the grounds of necessity.

This makes the economic situation of the people vastly unequal. But we are not equal. Rights are not based on equality, but on personhood. There is no right to be equal to others, as the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard shows; there is not even a right to equality of opportunity.

This is a fact: these “rights” of equality and equality of opportunity do not exist; it does not dehumanize me if someone else has greater advantages than I have. I have tried to show the basis for this in my book on economics and ethics. “Compassion” cannot face this fact; and therefore, it should not be what directs one’s actions.

“Compassion” would also be in favor of individual “charity” as opposed to governmental action, because actions of individuals to individuals is more “personal.” The problem here is that, though some percentage (let us say, for the sake or argument, a quarter) of my income is not by rights mine because my mere possessing of it is depriving others of necessities, still *no single person* among those deprived has any right to more than an infinitesimal part of this—given that there are millions of deprived people in the world. But each person has a right *against the whole class of the affluent* to the conditions for a minimally human life.

Now suppose I give fifty dollars to a needy family. This is much less than they need to live a minimally human life; and so they are not receiving what they have *a right* to receive from me and people like me. Yet they have no right to receive even one dollar *from me*, and so my action of giving them fifty is objectively an act of generosity toward them (in particular) on my part.

This puts them in the position of having to be grateful to me for generosity when what they are receiving is something they have a right to receive. And I am receiving gratitude for my generosity in giving *much less than I have an obligation to give* to the poor as a class.

The relation is a personal one, to be sure; but if there are such things as economic *rights* (and I agree with the American Bishops that there are, though not quite in what their extent is), then this person-to-person giving and receiving is calculated only to (a) enable the affluent to do less than they probably have an obligation in justice to do, and (b) feel good doing it, while the poor (a) receive less than they have a right to receive, and (b) must be grateful to the donors for giving it to them. It is an anti-human situation, which is only permissible if the government can't function, or when the government isn't functioning.

The problem is an exceedingly complex one; but it is basically the government's problem, and is not one for the individual citizen. The problem is how to keep society (in this case by its affluence) from actively doing harm to the powerless without creating incentives for people to drop from the class of "those with very little power" into "the powerless." It is not my purpose in these pages to suggest solutions to the problem; this is an ethical issue and a practical issue, and the book before us is one of how the layman expresses the Christian attitude.

Let me, then, close this section with two remarks. There can definitely be a vocation for the layman who thinks he can see ways of steering government between the Scylla and Charybdis I just mentioned: who can look all the facts square in the face, and become an advisor to the government in what must be done, and how it can be done, given the realities of the society and of the people in government. If his advice is followed, fine; if not, his Christian attitude is that he has done his job, offered what he has to offer, and that is all that is to be expected of him.

Other laymen, who have not studied the issue, need not feel guilty

if they are not involved with the plight of the poor, because Christianity does not exist to right the wrongs in the world, but for the sake of the contribution one can make to the world—and this contribution need not be to the poor.

Nevertheless, in any governmental attempt to help the needy, there will be people who will “fall through the cracks,” who need help (or even who can use help), and who must, humanly speaking, be cared for, or who can be cared for privately without the bad side-effects of creating incentives toward dependence. Insofar as the Christian knows of such people, he will do something to help them, realizing that this is not something he is doing to rid himself of guilt at being affluent, but something that can be done, that he can do, and why not do it?

The one thing Christianity can be said to have done for us is free us from guilt. When supposedly “Christian” preaching has a function of creating an attitude of “I will be guilty unless I do...” it is, I think, the Christian version of Phariseism, where Christian virtue consists in “works” and not in a way of looking at things.

The upshot of all of this is that, though it is not anti-Christian by any means to give away all you have to the poor, this is not the only Christian attitude a person can have toward his money and possessions. I thought it was necessary to clear this up before we could even consider how the layman is to look at his money.

The phenomenology of money

So let us consider what it is the layman (or anyone, of course) has when he has money. It is clearly not gold; those pieces of paper in one’s pocket do not in fact represent certain amounts of gold. Nor is it “cash”; some money, called “legal tender” is “cash,” in that the coins or notes cannot be refused when offered as payment (as one can refuse a check). But there are checks and credit and debit cards also. Checks, when acceptable, refer to a number in a bank account—that is all, really: a number. That number does not represent a certain

amount of gold or dollar bills; there is much, much more money in bank accounts than the number of bills in existence, let alone the amount of gold stored somewhere. And the credit card doesn't even represent a number anywhere in any account.

What then is money? It is something that can be spent: that is, you can hand it over to someone else in exchange either for some object or some action on his part which you want (a product or service). Notice that the money does not specify *what kind of object or action* it can be spent for; but the money you have does limit *the total amount* of such things that you can obtain at the moment.

Hence, money limits something. After you give up the money, you've got the object or service, which you can then do with as you like. But what is the money before you give it up? It is, as they say, "purchasing power"; that is, it is the *ability* to have (this amount of generic) product or service, which you can use as you see fit.

So when you possess money, what you possess, really, is the concrete embodiment of that abstraction called an "ability." And if we look at the ability more closely, we find that, since the object or service you buy is bought so that you can *do* something with or by means of it, then the ultimate goal of the purchase is *some activity of your own*. Even if you buy a painting, for instance, you buy it so that you can hang it in your house and look at it when you please (and that's the action that is your goal), or so that you can tell others that you own a genuine Utrillo (and then that becomes the goal), or that you can prevent others from looking at it—or some combination of these or other acts the painting enables you to perform.

So money enables you, basically, to *do* things you wouldn't otherwise be able to do; it is an ability to *act*, in the last analysis. And since it doesn't specify *which* act it enables you to perform (even sins cost money), then it is an ability to do any of a number of acts. And of course, the ability to do different sorts of acts is *freedom*.

Money, then, is a certain kind of freedom—which is one reason why people find it desirable. Our phenomenological analysis is leading

us into some interesting territory. But, as I said, money has an amount attached to this freedom; you are free when you have it to do what you please, but you are free only up to the limit of the number it represents. This is true also of credit cards; there is always a limit of the credit that the card allows you to use. So money is limited freedom.

This explains why people want more and more of it, up to a point. We like being free; and up to a point, we would like to be freer to do what we please. But there comes a point in most people's lives where more money does not really have this meaning: when you have more money than you really know what to do with. When you have all you want to achieve the goals you have in your life, then more money gives you security that you won't have to give them up; but beyond this point, you put it in the bank, and it just keeps accumulating, without your either spending it or intending to spend it for anything.

And that, of course, is the point at which you are *rich*. You are rich when you have more than enough money to do what you have *beforehand* set as a goal for your activities. When you spend money as rich, it is often the case that you buy something just because it is there and catches your eye, not because you needed or even wanted it beforehand. And very often you buy it and simply store it away, or use it only once or twice.

But before exploring this further, there is something else about the freedom that money is. There are many freedoms we have that don't involve money. The freedom to walk down the street need not be bought; the freedom to read books from the library; the freedom to look at the beauty of the sunset; the freedom to find someone to love; the freedom to vote.

So money is an amount of a *certain kind* of freedom. You are free to do what you please *only with respect to objects or actions of other people that they are willing to exchange for money*. You may like another's Utrillo, and offer to buy it, and he may say, "It's not for sale." Even if you offer him a million dollars, it is not the case that

everything has its price. He may not be interested in what a million dollars would allow him to do; but he may want the Utrillo and what it allows him to do with it.

Note that if someone exchanges an object with you for money, what *he* is doing is performing an action that deprives him of the object, for the sake of the freedom the money represents to him. And if he performs an action for you for the money, then his act does not benefit him; but he does it anyway in exchange for the amount of freedom you offer in exchange. In both cases, he is *doing something for your benefit* in exchange for the money. And doing something for another's benefit, when this action is "compensated" (as opposed to being done out of pure love) is a *service*. It is not slavery or love, because it is compensated.

Hence, *money is a certain amount of freedom to use the services of others for one's own benefit*. The supposition is that when you give the other person money for what is for him a service (even if it is the service of providing the product you bought), then you have *exchanged* for the service, an amount of freedom which now allows *him* to use the services of others for *his own* benefit; and since he has agreed on this amount as compensation, he does not consider that he has lost anything by the transaction.

Hence, in itself, money involves the free exchange of activity for others' benefit (the service) for a certain amount of ability to command the (free) services of others for one's own benefit.

That is, you *get* money basically by serving others for it, and what you get is the ability to use the (freely offered) services of others for your own benefit. It involves a mutuality of service.

All this sounds very much as if it can be Christianized. You are using others when you use money; but you are, first of all, using those who are willing to be used in this way; and you aren't really using them, because you give them in return the amount of ability to use still others' services to put them in a position that is just as good as (if not better than) where they would have been if they had not served

you. You use their free services, but leave them better off for it; an while you are at it, you contribute to a community of service and freedom.

Unfortunately, there is a cutworm at the roots of this plant, which stunts its growth and can kill it.

The worm is this: All is rosy if we all have enough to live a minimally human life, and money is exchanged for objects or services that (a) allow us to achieve freely-chosen goals over and above the minimum necessary to stay humanly alive, and (b) suppose that the one serving us is receiving more than simply enough to stay humanly alive, and can use the money to achieve freely chosen goals.

Let me define “necessities” as “objects or services without which a person cannot live a minimally human life.” Let me define “values” as “objects or services which enable one to achieve some freely chosen goal, which is not necessary in order to be minimally human.”

Given that there are such things as necessities (a certain amount of basic food, water, shelter, heat, etc.), and that not everyone simply has them for the asking, people in general have to get them by serving others to get the money to pay for them (because they are supplied by human beings, and supplying necessities is, after all, a service and deserves compensation).

Suppose a person has nothing but his ability to serve others. He now *must* serve others or starve. The money of the people he serves is now not something that is simply an *ability* to use his (freely offered) service, but is in fact *power* over that service; because it isn't really freely offered. He *has* to offer it, or die.

Hence, because necessities can be bought and sold (the person who supplies water or medical care will find that the consumer *must* buy his service or die), then the money becomes power over others; control over others' lives. You have freedom *at the expense* of others when this occurs.

And it is this power over others' lives that makes the “love of money the root of all evil.” Instead of money's being a community of

mutually compensated generous activity, it becomes the domination by those who have it (or those who have control of the necessities) over those who have not. It is the seeking of one's own benefit at the expense of others' lives, and it only has the *appearance* of using freely offered service.

At this point, I think it is possible to see why "it is harder for a rich man to have God as his ruler than for a camel to pass through a needle's eye." It isn't that the rich man's wealth is necessarily impoverishing others; it is the fact that, *having* great wealth is calculated to create the attitude that others exist to serve one. A very wealthy person may not be able to command the services of some specific person (not everyone has his price); but there is always someone willing to serve him for whatever he wants done; and so it is very hard to avoid the notion that he has a "right" of some sort to be served. Others tend to be looked at as supplying his own needs, and, being wealthy, he is not in the position where he *has* to serve others in order to get into this state of being able to be served. Others *freely* serve the rich man, and even when he is in the position of actually forcing others to serve him or starve, it still seems to him as if they are doing it freely—since, not starving himself, he does not see that in fact they are under a threat because of him. Since he is in fact important to others, this tends to cause him to think of himself as "objectively important"—which is the antithesis of the Christian attitude.

The point here, of course, is that money, like everything else human, is not evil in itself, but is "fallen," and needs to be redeemed. Conservatives see it in its basic goodness, and in how it involves freely offered service which is compensated, and they do not see its fallenness (though conservatives are apt to stress the fallenness of the people who use it); and liberals see how it is used to exploit and control other people, and therefore think that money and its power must be under the domination of a higher power (for example, government), or it will burn us all up.

I think the Christian is in a position to see that a certain attitude toward money and what it is—an attitude that recognizes what its nature is and just where that nature is fallen, can redeem money, and bring it into its true liberation of mankind. For each Christian, this will be a personal attitude toward money, which can be spread through explaining what one is doing; and it is to be hoped, the “good news” about money can spread in this way throughout the world and divinize what is now perhaps the least divine of human activities. This is what “making friends with sinful property” can mean.

The Christianization of money

In order to acquire the Christian attitude toward money, a person first has to give up certain myths connected with life and economic life in particular.

The first thing that has to be given up—perhaps the most pernicious thing for economic theory—is something that sounds extremely Christian, and in fact was articulated most clearly by St. Augustine at the beginning of the *Confessions*: “You have made us for Yourself, Master, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”

That, I think, is simply false. God made us *because of* himself, but not *for* himself, as if possession of him was our *goal* in life. I have argued before that neither the natural nor the supernatural possession of God can be a real goal for our lives: the natural, because in fact the mere possession of God does not totally satisfy us (as we can see since we now possess him by knowledge and love, but are not totally satisfied with this meagre possession); and the supernatural, because what is beyond nature must be a pure gift which is precisely *not* desired by our nature (“nor has it entered into man’s mind to conceive the glory that awaits us”).

St. Augustine assumed—gratuitously—that, since we long for “the good” as understood, and that means “goodness” in the abstract or

ignoring any definiteness (limit) to it, then any definite good which was not Absolute Goodness would leave us unsatisfied, because we would know that this was not what we desired.

But if you assume, as I think is true, that our freedom means that *we create* “the good” simply by imagining a state of affairs and using that conception as the standard for judging what the facts are, then it does not follow that we automatically desire something called “the good.” *When* we desire (see things as not being the way we conceive they “ought” to be), then simply by definition what we desire is called “the good”; but it is good simply because it is the goal we have set for ourselves, not because it is something objective that attracts us.

This means that “the good” for a given person is something definite and finite, and he is *not* “restless” once he possesses it, always desiring more and more until he reaches the Infinite. True, young people do tend to desire more and more, because they have not yet defined themselves, and they are still experimenting with the various possibilities open to them; so they set goals for themselves. But once one reaches middle age, this restless striving tends naturally to get into a desire for “security,” and a discomfort with change, even change for what might be called “the better”; and the older one becomes, the more rigid he grows, if anything desiring the return of the past more than flights into unknown tomorrows.

The importance of this for economics is that *in fact* we are not infinitely greedy. There is nothing built into our nature that produces a discontent with what we have, making us want more and more. The economic myth is that “desires are infinite, resources finite,” and therefore we must always be coping with resources inadequate to do what we want.

But desires depend on what people’s goals actually are. True, people who blunder through life and don’t know what their goals are are rather easily persuaded to adopt new goals when these are attractively presented; thus, advertising is by no means a waste of time. But the advertising PR men are misleading us when they say that all

advertising does it bring to notice new things—“provide information”—which people take into account when deciding what to give up in order to get what. Advertising tries to *create interest* in these new things and the goals they represent; the goals are not necessarily desired just because the person will be “better off” if he has them. Think of how the symphony orchestras have to work to persuade people that the (objectively complex and more meaningful) music they offer is worth sitting through. Beethoven loses to the Beatles almost every time.

Recognizing this, the first thing, it seems to me, that the Christian should be clear about is what his goals in life are, which is another way of saying what sort of human being he considers himself to be. Of course, he is the sort of human being who loves God above everything and loves as God loves; but *who is it* that is doing this love? What properties do *you* have as the lover? That is, what other acts besides love are your acts—or better, what are the acts in which you love as God loves?

What I am getting at is that Jesus was a Jew of the first century A. D., of a certain height, speaking a certain language, with a certain style of dress and hair, and so on and so on. He was the embodiment of God’s love in the world; but he was a definite embodiment, a picture of which can (I think) be seen in the Shroud of Turin.

Similarly, the Christian is someone who is of a definite size, skin color, style of dress and style of life: one who cares or does not care about classical music, one who likes or does not like to work with his hands and tinker with machinery, one who reads or does not, and so on. What are you? Your definition of yourself will be in terms of the actions you perform that are “yours.” What do you want to do in your life—which is another way of saying what do you want to do with your life, or even what do you want your life to be?

To do is to be; you define yourself as “the person who does such-and-such”; and your goals in life are the actions that you consider to be “the real you,” whether you are doing them at the

moment (and in that respect are successful, and if you are aware of the success, happy), or not (and at the moment are unfulfilled if the goals seem possible but not yet attained, and frustrated if they seem impossible).

To love as Jesus loves, then, does not mean that you “give up” being a definite person, who does very definite things; it means that this definite person you are is not *important* to you; you *love* this person who is yourself with your goals; you *respect* him as God respects him. It is not that your fulfillment matters to you as something that must be attained at all costs; it is that you are a human being, created as a goal-setter by God, and you respect this creation of God so that you set goals for yourself that do in fact lead to fulfillment and even enjoyment. We saw in the chapter on vocation that there are certain innate dispositions that “want” as it were to express themselves, and these are our vocation in life. In that chapter, I was stressing the tendencies that take us out of self-interest; but here I want to point out the fact that one who respects his genetic makeup will listen to this internal vocation and find out what actions his talents lead to, and use them as goals to define just what this lover of God in the world is.

Now it is not necessary, of course, to spend a week or a month in retreat to define once for all what the complete set of those actions is to be, still less to think that, once you have set a goal for yourself, you will never listen to experience when it tells you that you were mistaken and should reformulate your self-definition. This is one of the reasons we are changing creatures. Our self-definition comes gradually, and can continue up until the moment we die, never totally leaving the past choices—they always remain with us unless they are sinful and erased by the miracle of confession and the change of attitude—but building on them and refining them, making the person we are eternally to be more and more complex and interesting.

The Christian, in this goal-setting and refining, has an advantage over the non-Christian, in two senses. First of all, since the achieving

of the goals is not the ultimate in importance—his self is not the be-all and end-all of his interest in life—then he is less likely to get locked into goals that he has set and refuses to give up even when they are seen to be not what he thought them to be. He is the opposite of some alcoholics, who are so wrapped up in themselves as drinkers that they cannot give up the drinking with all its attendant miseries because this is to give up the one thing that really defines themselves, and they cannot give up themselves. The Christian has given up himself in this sense of something that *must* be held onto, come what may.

Secondly, the Christian, in setting goals for himself in the presence of God, knows that he is doing it because he loves himself as God loves him, not because he is the be-all and end-all of his existence. But he also knows that God loves him infinitely, and knows where his true fulfillment and enjoyment lie; and that God will help the person who seeks the “best” definition of himself find it—always consistently with his freedom, and always consistently with taking himself away from self-interest and giving up his self as a sort of god to worship (as we saw in the section on sanctity).

But since God knows the creature’s fallibility and yet his sincerity and respect for himself in setting goals, the Christian is aware that God will not allow him to make mistakes—in the long run, that is. Mistakes will turn out to be serendipitous; “everything works together for good for those who love God.” Just as God will help the sinner frustrate himself, the Christian knows that God will help the one trying to love him fulfill himself; and so he can with confidence choose the thing that seems most reasonable and pursue it, knowing that even if it is a mistake, he will be better off somehow for having made it. This is the faith of the Christian layman, and any Christian, for that matter.

Avoiding materialism

The second myth that must be given up by the Christian is the Stoic overlay that has plagued Christianity since the beginning: that “spiritual” things like thinking or even seeing and hearing (e.g. art and music) are “high” and “material” acts (like sex or eating or clothes or possessions) are somehow “low” and degrading, even if not downright sinful.

This is partly because the Bible contrasts “the spirit” and “the flesh,” and, particularly in St. Paul, “the flesh,” and “thinking according to the flesh” loses out to “thinking according to the spirit.” In the first place, the term that is translated “flesh” occasionally means “meat,” as in “when you eat my flesh” (i.e. the meat that is my body), but more often it simply means what we mean by “matter” or “materiality” (i.e. that which is simply not spiritual), and has no connotations of “skin” or sexiness as we now have when we use the term “flesh.”

What St. Paul meant by “thinking according to the flesh,” then, was thinking in materialistic terms, not taking the spiritual realities of salvation and so on into account; and I think it is a mistake to think that the body, which was also redeemed, is something somehow evil. True, “the flesh” wars against the spirit; we do have a materializing tendency in ourselves; but St. Augustine fought this one out against the Manicheans. Matter and what is material is loved infinitely by God also. There is nothing bad about it in itself.

But this “lowliness” of what is the more material aspect of ourselves leads to a kind of false redemption in the attitude that regards mealtimes, for instance, as truly Christian only when the fact that you are actually *eating* is ignored in favor of “conversation,” and the taste of the food and so on is something not to be mentioned. That there could be such a thing as a symphonic dinner, in which the tastes were precisely arranged for an aesthetic effect is something that would be inconceivable for this type of mentality; to concentrate on the taste of the food as if it could be meaningful in its relation to other tastes is, if not sinful, at least a travesty of spirituality—for this

kind of mind, it is “the flesh” and its desires trying to insinuate itself into our lives in the sheep’s clothing of art.

The point, of course, is that the Christian, and most especially the Christian layman, has a love for material things, including his own body and its bodily functions, and he respects the material with God’s infinite respect; he does not look down on it as “beneath his dignity and high calling as a child of God.” There is nothing crass about material possessions; they are extensions of our bodies, by which we can do things that otherwise we cannot do; and so they are to be respected with God’s infinite respect also.

Then what is the materialism which is to be avoided if you are truly Christian? As far as the body is concerned, it is the centering on the body and its acts as the display of the importance of the self. The person who is concerned with dress and appearance or physical fitness *as* a way of being attractive so that others will be attracted or envious is using bodily appearance the way some use the spiritual attributes of learning to enhance his selfhood and give importance to it, either in others’ eyes or even just in his own. On the other hand, not having this attitude does not mean that you neglect appearance or physical fitness, any more than not viewing education as a means by which you can look down on others as inferior means that you remain ignorant. It is a question of attitude. The Christian respects his body infinitely, and respects his mind infinitely. He does not neglect his appearance, for two reasons: first, because an unpleasant appearance means that he is to some degree repellent to others, and why do that? Secondly, because this body of ours is our major work of art, the one closest to hand; and why should we treat it as if it were dirt, and do nothing to beautify it? God doesn’t mind if we go around with matted hair and dirty nails and a paunch, any more than he minds if we remain ignorant or neglect our yards; but this is not to respect the creation he has given us to work upon.

So the Christian can engage in a physical fitness program with as much fervor as the vainglorious atheist. God gave me this body; and

I am going to make of it as beautiful a thing as I can. There is no materialism in this. This body will be with us, resurrected, forever; but the resurrected body, the plant that emerges from the seed we see before us now—as St. Paul says—will be the plant that grows from the seed we have created, and a shriveled seed will eternally be a stunted plant. God will not beautify our resurrected body in spite of us; the body we live with forever will be mediocre or radiant beyond belief insofar as we respect it here and cultivate it out of Christian love for it.

And in this, the Christian spiritualization of things is different from the pagan type of spiritualism. The pagans laughed at St. Paul because he said that the *body* would return to life and live forever; they believed in eternal life, but only as a spirit, who at last was free of this cage of a body that it had got trapped in.

Now then, to get to the point that is more relevant in our discussion of economics, materialism in possessions comes about when we acquire the possessions just because we have the means—the money—to acquire them, whether we want to do anything with them or not. It is the person without goals who heaps to himself means without ends who is the materialist.

In this, the Christian attitude toward material possessions is connected with the first point I made about goals being finite and our not being infinitely greedy. The goal of any possession is *the action you can perform with it*. The possession itself does not mean anything except as an extension of your body, another organ, as it were. In fact, the Greek word “organon,” from which we get “organ,” means “tool”; Aristotle thought of the body as “organic” in the sense that it was a set of tools permitting certain types of activity; and in this he was perfectly right. Possessions extend the organism, and make us able to do more.

Thus, the computer I am now using makes me able to communicate with you, in such a way that I can look at what I am writing and can revise it easily, as well as print it into a pleasant book-like format

with no trouble. It enables me to do things as a writer that before I got it were extremely difficult and even impossible. And I look on myself as a writer: I have things to share with vast numbers of people, even after I die; and to do this, I need to have things written down. And I enjoy it; part of my constitution is to be a writer. So the computer makes me more myself.

Am I “tied down” by it, “chained to the machine”? Nonsense. In one sense, I would be lost without it, because I would be lost without the acts it enables me to do so easily and enjoyably. But in another sense, I am not its slave; it is mine. Similar with my car, which I also love. It moves me from place to place in a comfort inconceivable by kings two centuries ago, with whole symphony orchestras playing just exactly what I choose while I am at it—something Elizabeth I couldn’t have; she only had Handel and the court musicians to play for her on her trips down the Thames. I can have Handel or Wagner and played by the New York Philharmonic or the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields. As I drive and watch the scenery, I have the world of auditory art to comfort me. This is to be a slave of the machine? This is materialism? Even my traveling leads me to goals which are more than just the physical location I am headed for.

Now of course, I could do this sort of thing if I just rented a car and didn’t own one. But ownership of the car allows me to do it when and in the way in which it is most convenient for me. The shape of the car expresses my esthetic idea of what motion, to me, means; the accessories and so on in the car enable me to do the kinds of things I want to do when I am engaged in this activity of traveling. Similarly, using the College’s computer could be done; but then I would not necessarily be able to write when I had the time, or when the ideas came to me. Having three computers, as in fact I do, enables me to use my computer in my office in school, and also when I get home; and at the same time, it allows my wife to be using the computer at the time I am using mine. She uses hers rather less than I do; but she finds it extremely helpful to what she is doing (for, I might say,

reasons considerably different from mine); and so it makes sense to have several computers.

What is the difference between this sort of thing and materialism? It is materialism to buy a computer because “this is what one does” when one reaches a certain income level. What the computer can do for you is secondary. Very often, having bought it—and usually “the best” one too—you have spent so much money for it that you regret having it sit around idle, and you try to find a use for it. So you play games on it, or spend hours figuring out how to keep your tax records on it, and when it comes to the crunch, you get out your pencil and paper and do the whole thing the old way anyhow. This is materialism; making the *means* the *end*, or even having the means *define for you an end* that you never had beforehand.

This is not to say that the materialistic attitude cannot lead to self-expansion. There are many, perhaps, who have bought computers without any idea of what to use them for who then became fascinated with them and learned all sorts of things, and found their lives greatly enriched. But this is by accident; it is the act of one who does not have goals, and is letting chance determine what his reality is to be.

But the Christian has some fairly good idea of what he is; and so he has a reasonable idea of what actions he wants to perform: he has goals. These goals, then, imply certain means toward their realization; and these means involve using and even often owning parts of the material world. The Christian then can figure out what he should own, and how much of it in order to be able to pursue the goals he is interested in.

For instance, I happen to be interested in music in a rather serious way. I love classical music, and I can hear differences in different performances, and recognize that they mean different things. I can also hear when something is off pitch or off tempo, and so on. People standing around the piano “having a good time singing” are a source of distinct distress to me; I hate to hear even bad music ruined; and I cannot stand to participate in it. On the other hand, it is an act that

I consider very proper to myself to be able actually to participate in producing good music well: to make the composer's meaning come through to people.

For this reason, I belong to Cincinnati's May Festival Chorus, and spend Monday nights during the year rehearsing Brahms and Verdi and Mahler and Haydn, until the final two weeks when Leonard Bernstein or Claus Tenstedt or some other famous conductor comes to lead us in performance—many of which are quite good, and some of which have been great. The chorus is a means by which I can make a contribution that is in me to make, but which I certainly can't do by myself. It is my instrument, if you will.

(I have a confession to make. Since I originally wrote this—I am revising in 2004—I had an audition for the chorus, which instead of just “pass/fail” gave me a grade. And though I passed, my grade on vocal production was so low that I thought, “Mendelson doesn't deserve this,” and I quit. It wasn't worth it to be just a body increasing the volume level but not making a positive contribution.)

But I also own fairly high fidelity sound equipment in my house, enhanced just a few days before this writing by a compact disk player. The appreciation of music as well as the production of it is part of my reality; and it makes sense for me to have rather expensive equipment, because the hiss and buzz and distortion of the cheap equipment is something that destroys the aesthetic effect for me.

But for someone who likes to listen to pop music, and for whom the difference, say, between FM radio sound and AM sound—as long as the latter is decent—is of no consequence, then owning a super-high-fi stereo system is materialism. The difference between what the expensive equipment can *do for him* and what the cheap one can do is nil; in either case, he can hear the music he wants and can appreciate it as fully as he is interested in.

When this kind of person buys very expensive equipment, then he is faced with the nuisance of all those knobs and equalizers and balances and adjustments to the tweeters of his speakers and so on;

and it is very apt to be the case that he doesn't bother studying the manual that comes with the system, and just leaves all the knobs wherever they happen to be, and finds that the sound is even less satisfactory than the little set he had when he was poor and couldn't afford anything this grandiose. This is to be the slave of machinery.

This sort of person doesn't know what he wants to do, and so the machine or the possession isn't a means toward an end; it is there, forcing him often to act in a way he wishes he didn't have to act.

Or suppose he subscribes to cable television. Why? Does he do it because he wants a clear picture, or because there is some channel like the news channel that he can get with the cable that he can't get without it? Or does he subscribe just because it is "better" and then find that he can get three NBC stations now instead of one; and all with perfect clarity showing the same program at the same time. Or he can get the Movie Channel, and watch movies; but he isn't particularly interested in which ones; and you can watch movies without having cable. He sits in front of the TV for hours, and just has it on without even paying attention to the program guide; he is watching the program (if you can even call it "watching," because he is distracted most of the time) he is watching because it happens to be on, and there is no particular reason for tuning in a different channel. The means is determining the activity. This is materialism.

On the other hand, one who subscribes to cable television for a definite reason is not being materialistic; he knows what activity it enables him to do, and he ignores the other acts that are irrelevant to his purposes and uses it for the purpose for which he subscribed to it.

There is nothing wrong, in other words, in surrounding yourself with material possessions, if you know what you are going to do with them; if you have the goal beforehand, and they enable you to reach that goal. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, in his *Divine Milieu*, has a beautiful chapter about the spiritual value of the material, which is what essentially I am driving at—and which is, as I recall, where I got the idea. This is the redemption of possessions; they are subsumed

under the eternal goals you have for yourself; and in that sense you will take them with you as your eternal milieu.

I suppose this is the place also to talk about how the Christian deals with the possessions, particular the technological ones, he owns.

There are those who are so afraid of being slaves to machinery that they never learn to submit to the machinery; they resent having to study it and learn how to use it; and the result is—especially with complicated machinery like computers or stereo sets—they break it, and then complain how things aren't made the way they used to be. As a matter of fact, they aren't; they're made considerably better. With the old radios, the tubes would burn out; new radios will last practically forever. The old cars—yes, those well-built old cars—were really old when they'd been fifty or sixty thousand miles, and would need ring jobs and valve jobs and transmission overhauls long before a hundred thousand miles was reached, by which time they'd be a piece of junk. Now a hundred thousand miles is middle age for a car that is reasonably well taken care of. No “they don't make 'em the way they used to” is the excuse of the person who has no respect for the exceedingly complex assistant he has acquired, and wants to be its master and make it do his will simply by telling it what to do.

But the Christian has God's infinite respect for his material universe. He will submit to the reality of the machine; he will study it and learn what it does, and how it “wants” to do it; and he will *cooperate* with it, so that both together can do what the machine does. And what the machine does is, of course, the means toward the goal that the owner wants to achieve. He and the machine together cooperate to achieve this goal. The Christian is not so enamored of his own “dignity” that he cannot submit to a set of silicon chips and work their way while he is using them. He respects his machine; he loves it infinitely.

And, of course, this respect enables him to dominate the machine. Knowing what it can do, knowing all of its possibilities, he can pick out the course of action that will do most closely what he wants most

quickly and easily. The machine becomes truly his tool, an extension of his hands and of his mind. It is by submission that we control the material world. It will do what we want, but it will do it only in its own way; if we want it to do what we want, but in our way, it will balk. To treat the material world of machines as slaves to be forced into service is not God's respect for the world of technology.

Technology, in other words, can be redeemed by the Christian; there is nothing evil about it; but it too is fallen, and can lead us into materialism and slavery to our possessions. But when we learn to submit to them and cooperate with them, then they can be beautiful, and our own lives and those around us can be enhanced beyond measure. Why should we give up this humanization and spiritualization of our lives, just because it is machinery and not "natural," as if only the "natural" is divine?

Putting together, then, what has been said on these two main points, the Christian will have a fairly good idea of what his reality means in terms of actions; and this life style of his can then be assessed in terms of what he needs in order to live in the way he has set for himself; and this in turn will give him an idea of how much money he will need to be able to afford these means.

Therefore, the Christian will have a fairly accurate notion of the income level that is "his" as a Christian living in this world; and money above that level is not something that is of interest to him; and in this way, he will avoid a second aspect of materialism: that the amount of money one can acquire somehow defines one's "worth."

Money and the "value of a person."

And here we come to the third myth that must be given up if one is to have a Christian attitude toward money: the myth that somehow one's income, or the money one can get for his services, is a reflection of the "objective value" of the service, and indirectly of the person who is performing it. Income is supposed to be a measure, somehow,

of human dignity.

This kind of materialism is extremely prevalent in our world; and it perverts the notion of what money is and makes a mockery of it. People demand enormous incomes, not because they have any intention of doing anything with the money, but just to show that they are “worth that much” to the people who pay these incomes. Pete Rose, the present manager of the Cincinnati Reds, demanded while he was playing baseball some years back a salary of millions of dollars a year, because, as he said in effect, he was the best baseball player in the business, and he wasn’t going to get a salary less than the top one in the business.

I hasten to say that I don’t think that it is *morally wrong* for someone like Pete Rose to demand such an exorbitant salary and take it if he can get it; because no one has to watch the Reds play baseball; and if they don’t want to pay the higher price for tickets, then they can spend their money on something they value more; and if Pete prices himself out of the market, then he just doesn’t play baseball—as almost happened a couple of years ago, upon which his asking price came down.

I will get into supply and demand shortly; but at the moment, what I want to stress is that the Christian is simply not interested in his “value as a person,” especially in comparison to the “value” of other people, least of all in this “value” expressed in such a way that you can put a number on it—as if our personhood could be bought and sold. This is what Marx sees as the evil of capitalism, this business of assessing the “value” of a person because the person is defined as “the one who is defined by what he does to be useful for others.”

Thus, the housewife, who wishes to be a housewife, and who works for no income at all, is not degraded, unless we take the “value” of herself or the “value” of her service as how much money she can command by it. But insofar as she is Christian, she is simply not interested in “how much” she is “worth” to the family; in the first place, she is necessary to it rather than “valuable”; and in the second

place, what the members of the family think of her services is relevant to her only insofar as she is trying to make them happy, not in trying to look good in their eyes.

Similarly, the person who is working and whose salary is less than the person who is doing “equal work” and equal work not as well beside him is not, if he is Christian, going to be interested in what his salary is in comparison with the other person’s, but in what his salary is in comparison with the income he needs to live according to the goals he has set for himself. This, I think, is the economic lesson of the parable of the workers in the vineyard, whose general lesson is that one should not be comparing oneself to others, but to what the Master is giving oneself in relation to one’s own needs and desires.

In fact, this Christian attitude can help solve a severe problem in our economic reality nowadays. In the first place, the economic realities of “equal pay for equal work” (which in practice means “equal job description” and has little to do with equal productivity, equal effort, or other such inequalities) has meant, now that women have entered the work force in large numbers, not that women’s salaries have risen to meet men’s, but that men’s salary increases have slowed down so that they have dropped in the direction of the women’s.

The result is that it is increasingly difficult to maintain a reasonable standard of living on one salary. Now, both partners in a marriage *have* to work. If the family has many children, then the amount of “disposable income” (that used for goals rather than necessities) becomes smaller and smaller. For those who would answer that “you have the choice of having or not having children,” I would counter that children are not like compact disk players or computers: things that are “chosen” to *advance one’s own goals in life*. They are *not* economic values, leading to ends in oneself, and *must not be categorized with such ends*. Whether to have children and how many to have involves economic considerations, to be sure, and rational thought, and must not be left up to “God will provide” and irrational sexuality; but the children themselves *must not* be looked at as a kind

of “economic value” that is chosen or rejected in terms of how they fit into one’s life style.

Thus, salaries, and especially minimum salaries, should be adjusted in terms of how many people are to be supported on the salary, not in terms of what “the job” in the abstract is “worth” to the employer. Money is not a “measure of value,” really; it is a means of exchange of freedom. And if a single person receives the same amount of money as a person who must support six people, then the single person has the freedom to go to Europe, while the other has no freedom at all, since everything he earns is used up just keeping everyone breathing.

I don’t want to spend a lot of time on the economic analysis behind this, which I have gone into in my book on economic ethics. But briefly, it is this: First, those “absolute values” such as the “value of life” or the “value of honesty” are not “values” in this economic sense, but aspects of reality which must be respected. I think it is a mistake to call them “values,” as if they were in the same class as economically valuable objects.

Now in the economic sense of what is “valuable,” there is no such thing as the “objective value” of any object or service, simply because a “value” is a means toward someone’s goal, and so is relative to the goal, which is subjectively created. Goals are ranked in importance in a given person’s mind insofar as he considers which goals he will give up or postpone in order to achieve others. Values (the things that lead to goals) are ranked by the person according to two criteria: (a) how important the goal is that they lead to, and (b) how efficiently they get you there.

Thus, what one person considers valuable (e.g. a compact disk player) another may consider of no value at all: he is not interested in what it can do for him. Or one person may consider the player of much greater value than another, who sees that it can make the sound clearer, which would be nice; but not as nice as having a good steak dinner once a week for the next few weeks.

So from the buyer’s point of view, the value of an object varies

greatly, from zero to the most valuable of all values. There is no “real value” it has, because the goal it leads to is not a *goal* for anyone who does not choose to have it as a goal.

We are talking about *values*, now, not necessities; that is for the next section; values lead to freely-chosen goals; necessities must be had, or one cannot live even a minimally human life. With this distinction in mind, there is simply no such thing as the “real value” of something, even from the buyer’s point of view.

And from the seller’s point of view, the value of the product or service is always the *value of his service*. And this in turn is what he could be doing with his time if he were not performing the service (either the direct service or the service of making and supplying the product to the buyer)—it is what he is giving up in order to supply the value to the buyer.

But of course, what the seller is giving up depends on what *his* freely chosen goals are, which he could now be pursuing, and they vary from seller to seller. One seller is giving up a symphony concert; another is giving up beer and television; but both are providing the same service to the buyer. Thus, the *seller-value* of the service is not something that is “objectively there” in the product or service either; it is no more the “real” value than any given buyer’s assessment of its value is the “real” value.

But then what *is* the real value of the product or service? It has none.

But then what is the price? The price is the *compromise* between the buyer’s assessment of the value and the seller’s assessment of the value. The seller knows how much he has given up in providing the product—the cost of the materials and so on plus his time—and this gives him a “floor” beneath which he is selling at a loss; the buyer knows how important the goal this product leads to is in relation to other goals; and so this gives him a ceiling above which he will spend his money for something else.

Between these extremes, the buyer and seller must come to an

agreement, one offering a certain amount of money or demanding a certain amount, and the other accepting or rejecting, depending on the view each has of where the floor or ceiling is, and how far one should be above or below it to satisfy both parties.

When the price is agreed on, this does not mean that the price reflects the “real” value of the product; the buyer in all probability would have been willing, if pressed, to pay more, and the seller, if the haggling had been severe enough, would have taken less. It is just the compromise of the moment.

That’s all well and good in haggling between individuals, but what of the “market price”? This, to make a long story very short, is because of manufacturing, where huge numbers of products are produced, and haggling over each item is not possible. Hence, the seller tries to figure out what price enough people are willing to pay so that he can sell all the products he makes; he then names that price and offers the product on a take-it-or-leave-it basis.

Thus, this price is not the “real” value of the product or service either; it is simply the seller’s setting of some figure above his floor such that he can sell all he makes, based on his guess as to the fact that there are in fact twenty million people out there who are willing to pay that price—who value it this much.

But this is subjective on two different levels; it is the seller’s subjective evaluation of the number of buyers who have subjectively evaluated the product at this level. And ten tons of subjectivity do not weigh in at one ounce of objectivity. The price of a product or service *does not reflect any real value of that product or service*. It only apparently does so, because it’s on the tag, and if you want it, this is the price you have to pay, or do without it.

Competition affects the price of things; but not even competition and supply and demand makes the price reflect any real *value* that the objects have. But let me not prolong this.

So the fact that money *apparently* measures the “value” of something (but doesn’t, really), is part of its fallenness; and the

Christian must see through this and accept money for what it is: a means toward achieving one's goals, not a means of assessing relative human dignity.

Note that what this analysis implies for businessmen trying to set prices on things is that there is no necessity for setting the price as high as possible, consistent with selling all that is made, or with working full time. One knows the amount of money that is necessary for oneself to live the kind of life one wants to live; and beyond that, the money made is superfluous. Why, then, deprive the potential buyers of this extra amount of money just because you can do it and they will not be unwilling to pay it?

The point of demanding or asking for money is that the amount should be based on what the money is, not how much you can get. And what the money is is the ability to do something, using the freely offered services of others. Well, what do you want to do with it? If you are already doing all that you want to do, then all you want is enough money to enable you to keep doing it.

So there is nothing either economically unsound or immoral or anti-Christian in a person's simply making a "decent living" by his business, even though if he engaged in aggressive marketing, he could make more. Why make more? There is nothing wrong with trying to make more, if you have something definite you want to do with the "more." But if not, then, as John advised the soldiers, "be content with your pay."

It is, in other words, permissible to enjoy life in this economic world we live in; not to be guilty for having possessions that make your activities the kinds of activities you find most proper to yourself, and not to be running the ratrace of always trying to get more, to "advance" to levels you have no interest in, and so to wind up doing what you hate so that you can get an income that gives you more money than you know what to do with. Leave that sort of thing to the modern pagans; they think because they can afford two Ferraris that they are really somebody; if it makes them happy to be able to put

themselves above others because of this, then don't begrudge them the little satisfaction they have in all their frenetic striving. But you do what it is you want to do, first and foremost, you make your contribution to the world as the person you really are; and if your income is small, and you are doing what is your real activity, then what more can you ask?

Once again, the Christian can be happy in a way that the atheist can only with difficulty. The atheist can be happy too in this sense, if he knows himself and what his goals are, and does not compare his "worth" with others in economic terms. But the Christian, not being interested in his "worth" to others anyhow, has a tremendous advantage over him.

Values and necessities

The fourth myth about economic matters that must be abandoned to have the Christian (or in this case even a moral) attitude is the myth that necessities are in the same class as values, but are just "extremely valuable": the myth that was expressed by Benjamin Franklin as "When the well is dry, we know the worth of water."

My contention is that when the well is dry, we know that water is far beyond worth; and when it is full, we know that water is far beneath worth. In neither case is it a goal of ours to drink water; water is something we presuppose in order to be human, not something whose drinking defines our lifestyle (unless it is drinking Perrier as opposed to the stuff that comes out of the ground around here).

Values function entirely differently, economically, from necessities, and the Christian must be aware of this fact if he is going to view money and its relationships correctly. Let us look at the differences, as pointed out in my book on economic ethics:

First, we have a human right to necessities; we have no right as human to any value. The reason for this is simply that without a necessity we cannot live a minimally human life, and humans have a

right not be less than human; but humans have no right as human to be they type of human they happen to want to be.

Secondly, what values lead to (goals) are important; what necessities lead to (essential properties of humans) are not important, but necessary. Since the essential properties belong to us by nature, they are not a *purpose* of our activities. If we have them, we (rightly) take them for granted, because we have them simply because we are human; if we do not have them, we consider ourselves deprived, because we have a right to them.

Thirdly, there is nothing immoral in choosing to give up a value or the goal it leads to; it is immoral to choose to give up a necessity. The reason for this is that we are free to be what we choose, within the limits of our given humanity; and so any goal within those limits can be either chosen or rejected by us. But it is morally wrong for a person to dehumanize himself (e.g. to cut off an arm or blind himself), because this is to deprive himself of a property he has by nature.

The only time a necessity can be given up is when having it means giving up a greater *necessity*. But necessities may never be morally given up for any value, no matter how great. You may not cut off your finger even for ten million dollars.

Therefore, necessities cannot be classified with values; they have either zero value (if we have them), or infinite value (if we don't). Since, morally speaking, a person may give up any and all values, but may not give up a necessity, then it follows that, when confronted with a choice of having a necessity or having a great many values, the values must be given up; thus, the person who does not have the necessity must "value" it above *all* values—or, its value is infinite.

There are all sorts of moral implications of this, which we need not, for our purposes, go into; but what are the implications for the Christian? I think that the human dimension of the Christian comes into the forefront on this point. It is a question of recognizing the distinction, seeing what things are necessities and values, and acting consistently in one's own life in such a way that the necessities are

respected, but that this respect doesn't get confused with values and the flexibility connected with them.

Let me illustrate. A Christian physician should recognize that his service (health care) is a necessity for his patients, not a value; they don't come to him because they want to make their lives something distinctive, but because they have something wrong with them that they need corrected.

Now the physician has a right to compensation for his service; otherwise, he would be the slave of his patients. But since his service is a necessity, then, unlike the Pete Roses of this world, *he has no right to become rich from his service.*

Physicians are apt to resent this, because isn't health care of much more value than playing baseball? No. It is a necessity; baseball is a value. You must not compare the two. The problem with becoming rich from a necessity is this: you are becoming rich by charging people who (a) cannot refuse to pay whatever you ask (because on their side the "value" is not very great, but infinite), (b) cannot morally refuse the service (because then they are deprived of health), and (c) have a right to health care (because, as a necessity, one has a human right to it).

Now people have an obligation to pay for health care, because, even though they have a right to have it, they do not have a right to enslave anyone in order to have it—you never have a right that violates anyone else's right, and the provider has a right to compensation for his service. But the provider has a *right* only that he should not *lose* by performing the service; he has no *right* to become rich by his services. No one ever has a human right to be rich—and since this is so, no one has a right to the opportunity to become rich.

Hence, the physician, for whom providing the service is a *value*, and is finite (he is not dehumanized if he does not perform the service) is the only one who can assess what the *value* of his service is—because on the other side, it is a necessity, and not quantifiable. Hence, he has to say, "What is the lifestyle that will enable me to live

decently *but not extravagantly*? Anyone has a right to live decently by his service to others—to be more than poor, but not rich.

He then must figure out what this means in terms of yearly income, and what that means in terms of fees to “the average” patient *so that his income will not exceed this yearly “decent” figure*, and then adjust the fee from patient to patient, based on the *patient’s* ability to pay, so that the loss to each patient should be minimized. That is, a rich patient is “hurt” less by paying, say, fifty dollars for a service than a poor one would be by paying one dollar; and so, within the limits of the “decent” salary, fees should depend on ability to pay with as little strain on budgets as possible.

I submit that if this is done, lawsuits for malpractice will gradually go down, because patients will then see their physicians as living modest if not poor lives, and will recognize human frailty; whereas now, patients feel bled by the fees if not by leeches, when they see the doctors in mansions with multiple BMW’s in the garages; and they want to get back at them whenever the opportunity offers.

The point, of course, is that “supply and demand” and “what the market will bear” is *not* what must govern transactions dealing with necessities. It is perfectly all right when dealing with values; and in fact, interfering with the “market” when it is a question of values is counterproductive and probably morally wrong. This is the mistake of Communism. The mistake of Capitalism is to let “the market” determine prices even with necessities.

One more example. For most workers, work is a necessity, not a value. You work—for someone—or you starve; or, alternatively, you undergo that moral starvation of being on “welfare” which is the ill-fare of simply receiving without doing anything to show yourself that you deserve to receive. In a world of mutual service, this type of reception without service is to be endured only when it is impossible to do otherwise.

So work is a necessity. This means that employers can get away with hiring people for wages barely more than starvation and can

impose working conditions that are humanly all but unendurable—and, especially in times of high unemployment, they will find workers “willing” to take the jobs rather than face the worse alternative.

This “willingness” is analogous to the “willingness” of the patient dying of heart disease to pay the physician a hundred thousand dollars for the operation. When the alternative is only a worse evil, then “willingness” is the willingness of someone with a gun pointed at his chest.

Hence, any moral employer will offer wages, insofar as he can, that allow the workers to achieve reasonable goals, and not simply keep breathing; and he will see to it that working conditions are decent. Maximizing profit is not the goal of business. Business is a team-effort providing a service to the consumer, and compensating those who perform the service.

Profit is the compensation of the entrepreneur, not really for the “risk” of his money, but for his sinking the money into the business, when he could be doing something to his own benefit with it, and also for taking responsibility for the business and what it does both for and to the consumer and for and to the employees in it. This is a very great service, and it deserves compensation.

Again, however, this service is a *necessity* for the firm (without the entrepreneur, it simply can't exist), and so the *value* of the entrepreneur's service can only be assessed by him. Like the physician, he has to ask how much money he needs to achieve the lifestyle that is his goal in life, and adjust the profit accordingly. Should returns over this figure go to higher salaries for employees or lower prices for consumers, or both, and in what proportions?

Note that the entrepreneur is not quite in the same position as the physician, however, if the service the *firm* is providing is a value, because then it need not exist; and so he need not have as his goal a “merely decent” but modest lifestyle.

But this gets us into many complications. What I want to stress

here is that the Christian businessman need not think that there is something inherently wrong with capitalism and with profit; Marx was simply mistaken when he thought that profit was an exploitation of the worker. But the Christian businessman need not fall into the trap of assuming that the business is in business “really” to maximize return on investment, and the service to the consumer and wages for the worker are simply means to that end. There are three coordinate goals for any business: a decent profit for the entrepreneur, a decent salary and working conditions for the employees, and a good product or service at a reasonable price for the consumer. It is the entrepreneur’s function to balance off these three goals, taking the realities of the situation into account.

And the Christian, not having himself and his own greatness as the one overarching reason for all his actions, but having a divine respect for everything, himself included, is in the best position to be able to do this.

I personally think that capitalism, when the distinction between values and necessities is taken into account, is the system of economics that most closely approximates the reality of money and economic relations, and the system that leaves people freest to determine their own lives for themselves. Once again, it is in itself a good thing, but is fallen, and can be redeemed. And it is not socialism which will redeem it; socialism, I think, for various reasons, is a mistake which is contrary to the true nature of economic relations, and is doomed to be the specious solution which enslaves those unlucky enough to choose it. No, what will redeem economics is capitalism with a Christian attitude behind it.

There is again an enormous amount that could be said on how specifically the Christian can Christianize his economic life; but I must reiterate that this is just a preface, a foreword. The treatise must come later, and I suspect that it will not come from me, but be a treatise that will be written in action more than words.

Let me then pass on to the Christian at work, with the work

looked on now not in an economic sense as a service to others, but in the sense of how the Christian transforms the world.

Chapter 6

The Layman at Work

The phenomenology of work

It might seem that in speaking of work as service in the preceding chapter, I have revealed its Christian dimension, and in a book as sketchy as this one, no more need or even should be said. It is true that you serve others in working, and it is also true that willingness to serve is Christian and can make a task a joy. But all this is independent of what you are actually doing at your job, so long as you do it in a social context.

Actually, what the economic dimension of work does is make it possible for the Christian (or anyone, for that matter) to *choose* his work. That is, the fact that you get paid for a service means that you can do as a service the work your interior dispositions call you to, and then use the services of others (purchased with the compensation) to free you from the task of making your own clothes, chopping wood to heat the house, growing food, and so on.

Of course, this supposes that the particular work which is a person's "own" and is fulfilling to himself is also something the results of which others are willing to pay for—and enough so that a person can be freed from doing something else in order to get the necessities of life. This happy situation is the ideal, but does not always occur. It is, however, more common in our society than it was even in my childhood; then it was taken for granted that you got a job because it paid enough for you to live the way you wanted, though what you did

on the job itself was drudgery; now, it is assumed that work can be and even ought to be fulfilling to the worker.

But what are you doing in the act itself of working, whether you are working for someone else, working as an entrepreneur for “the public,” or just working on a project that is your hobby? This is what this chapter is about; how to take the Christian attitude to the work itself. Whether you have some raw material that you are changing, whether you are speaking to others, whether you are simply doing something that is observed by others, in all cases you are doing something that makes some part of the world different from what it had been before you did your work. Thus, *work produces a transformation of the world in some respect.*

Let us explore this, since it has some interesting implications for the Christian.

Suppose a person takes some wood and tries to make a chair out of it. The first thing to note is that there is nothing in the wood itself that directs it to being a chair, let alone this particular kind of chair; the form it takes as a chair is something that *can exist* in wood, but does not exist at the moment. Nor is this form “potentially” in the wood in the sense that the tree’s mature form is potentially in the young tree, which is headed in the direction of being the mature tree, nor even in the sense in which the form of the mature tree is potentially in the seed, which will stay a seed until water disturbs it, but which, once disturbed will grow into this kind of tree and no other.

No, the wood can be “forced,” as it were, to take the form of the chair, but it has no innate tendency to do so. The *form*, then, that it will take is *in the mind of the carpenter*, and nowhere else. Hence, when it exists as a chair, it speaks, not only of its nature as wood, but *about the mind of the person who made it*. It has something of himself in it.

So the first thing to notice about work is that it is *a finite sort of creation*. It differs from divine creation in that it imposes a form upon

already existing material, and the material must be capable of existing in that form (you can't make a chair out of salad oil), and that once the object is "created," it exists on its own without any active intervention from the creator (because the material preexisted the creative activity and was independent of it). God's creation is absolute; *everything* about any finite being is accounted for by his creative activity; there is no "preexistent" material that simply gets transformed and no finite act can continue without God's active cooperation. But work is creation nevertheless in the sense that there is something about the object that is inexplicable except for the activity of the one who worked on it.

To put this aspect of work in a context where its Christian dimension can be seen, let us look at the created universe from the point of view of God's activity on it.

I assume, first of all, that the universe has in fact evolved to the condition it is now in; the evidence in favor of this is overwhelming, and there is very little to indicate anything else. This was noticed, by the way, as long ago as by St. Augustine, who had no trouble with it, though the evidence he had was nowhere near as compelling as it is today.

God creates the universe, then, so that at first it exists in a condition that has the basic potential of being in the condition it is in today, though it is incapable by itself of being at this final stage (since in some respects—that of life and consciousness and thinking—this final stage is beyond the capability of physico-chemical reality. See my *Living Bodies* for the evidence). This "initial" universe is inherently *unstable* and has what we might call the active power to transform itself into the next stage—but only into that one stage. If one description of the earliest stage of evolution is true, the initial universe was an explosive mass of material, which immediately blew up and spewed extremely high-energy radiation into space. This stage then had the active potential to become another stage. In this case, the radiation could interact with itself and form electrons and protons and

so on, which could then form hydrogen atoms.

God in his creative activity is helping the world transform itself, and at each stage, he in one sense “lets” it act according to the laws of its own nature. But as evolution progresses, there are certain things that the developed material *could* become, but not by itself, because the result would be essentially beyond its capacity. That is, physical bodies can, if they have a certain chemical composition, be organized at that super-high self-maintaining energy level we call “life;” but they can’t organize *themselves* at this level, precisely because, from the point of view of the physics and chemistry of the system, this level is *unstable*, and to be alive, the body has to be *stable* at this level.

At this point, when the material is capable of supporting a higher form of organization, God intervenes, and “lifts” it beyond its *active* capability to the stage it is *passively*, as it were, capable of *supporting*. He lifts matter beyond itself. In this sense, creation as evolution indicates that God “cooperates” with the reality he created in that he causes it to act in accordance with its own laws, and only “lifts” it above itself by manipulating the chance element in those laws, not violating any of them.

So, in evolution, God is, as it were, working on the material he created, transforming it into forms that it does not have within it, but which it is capable of supporting. Only a superficial view of evolution would conclude that it takes place “by itself.”

But once human beings appear in the course of evolution, then the world that they touch takes a new evolutionary turn. God now cooperates with *them* as they put the stamp of their own spirit on the material universe; and so he is now working on the universe again, but *with and through* the human beings who no longer adapt themselves to their environment, but adapt the environment to themselves. When human beings work on the world, God is working on the world for the second time, and if work is creative activity, God is, so to speak, creating the world for a third time.

But a human being can put the stamp of *God’s Holy Spirit* onto the

world he works on by taking over God's attitude toward it. The obvious cases of this kind of transformation are things like the medieval cathedrals, which are the work of humans (interestingly, anonymous humans—who they are as individuals did not matter to them), but humans inspired by the love of God, who wanted stone to speak of the glory of God. Chartres makes no sense except as the world worshipping the God who created it—created it as stone, created it as being able to be formed by humans, and created it as being able to be formed by divinely inspired humans for the sake of the divine inspiration of other humans.

And it is this third level of creativity which is the Christian dimension of work. The Christian, by taking over God's attitude to what he is doing, transforms whatever he is working on *in a divine kind of way*.

The second thing to note here is that the goal of the worker exists in his own mind before it exists in the object; and that it exists in his own mind in such a way that it explains, not only what is happening to the object, but what *he himself is doing*. Thus, it is simultaneously a goal *for the object and for the person acting on the object*.

But a goal for a person is achieved by means of a *choice*, which is a spiritual, and therefore eternal, act. Hence, the person's goal for the object is in some sense an *eternal* goal, which does not disappear when he dies, but carries over into his eternal life, as one of the goals of *his* life, which must be realized if he is to be fully himself.

Let us consider what this means. When a worker works on something, the "goal" is that the object worked on *exist* as the person conceives it to exist. That is, when a carpenter makes a chair out of wood, his goal is not something either in his mind or in himself at all: it is for the wood to be a chair. Hence, the goal *within him* is realized *by something outside of him, existing independently of him*. And this goal *makes no sense* as simply a modification of himself; if the *chair* doesn't *actually* exist, the carpenter is unfulfilled as a carpenter; he has

failed to achieve his goal, however much he might imagine the chair, or imagine himself as having made a chair.

This means that the worker's choices make the purposes of his life expand beyond himself into the material world; if the purposes of his life remain within himself, he is a dreamer, not a worker.

But a choice—any choice—is an eternal act, that, once made, never leaves a person and can never be erased, short of the redemptive miracle we talked about in the chapter on Christian love when referring to the erasure of our sins. Hence, if a choice has a goal outside the person, it follows that that choice carries over to eternity and becomes part of the person's eternal life; and if it is not fulfilled, the result would be eternal frustration—which is another name for hell.

It follows from this that every person who is ultimately saved will have all the goals of his life fulfilled; not only the goals that are internal, but those which involve things outside himself, because these *are* goals of the person's life and explain his actions. Thus, the world will be the way the person who worked on it *chose* it to be, whether he achieved these goals during his life or not.

Presumably, however, we must recognize the restriction on these goals which also applies to the internal goals, and which in that case defines the moral obligation: *Goals which involve a contradiction of the nature cannot be achieved.* That is, if you want to be a different sex, you cannot achieve this goal, and so to attempt to make yourself into a different sex is immoral and doomed to eternal frustration. (The “sex change” operation simply allows you to *pretend* that you are a different sex afterward, since you still have the same genes, which determine all sorts of different parts of your body besides the sex organs.)

Similarly, one can argue, if you set up a goal for your son, say, which would imply that he must achieve *your* goal *instead* of his own (and thus contradict his own freedom) then you have set up a self-contradictory goal for him, and this goal will not be achieved (as

a goal of yours; if he happens to choose the same goal, he will be what you wanted, but only by accident). This presumably would be the same with any goal you would have for anything in the material universe; if the goal contradicts in some way its nature, it can't be achieved and leads to frustration.

I would guess also that it doesn't necessarily follow that goals you set up for things where what happens to them is a pure means toward your own benefit are really "goals for the world outside you"; and hence the fulfillment of these goals is not part of your eternal reality, but rather what would fulfill you is simply the *increase* in your reality for which these were the means. That is, if you build a chair, not because you care about the chair in any sense "for itself," but simply because you want to be able to sit down (or make money, or whatever), then what you will eternally achieve (even supposing there to be no immoral intention here) is the act of sitting down or whatever you wanted the money for. That is, for you, the *chair's* existence is irrelevant; it has no part in your spiritual life, but is simply a vehicle for something else which is important to you. This "something else" then will be what you will have eternally as your fulfillment, not the existence of the chair. What do you care about there being a real chair as long as you have what it will do for you?

But not everyone makes a chair simply for the sake of some further purpose, which is then the "real" purpose or goal. There are some furniture makers who *care* about chairs, and look on them in such a way that what they want is *for the chair to exist, and be a good chair*; we would say that they look on the chair as a kind of "work of art," and *it* is the *real* goal of their work, and the compensation for making and selling it is secondary to the existence of the chair itself.

In this case, *the worker has subordinated his own interior reality to the reality of the thing he is working on*, or has performed *an act of love* for the object worked on. And when this happens, the *beloved object* then becomes *as an independent reality* a part of the *lover's eternal existence*, and *must* exist as conceived or the lover is eternally

frustrated.

Thus, it is possible to love, not only persons, but inanimate things also. And when we love them, we do the same as when we love persons. Loving a person means considering the other person as *more important* than our own fulfillment, so that the other person's happiness *as distinct* becomes the goal of our actions. Loving a material object is the same sort of thing. It means *submitting* to its reality and *wanting it to exist in its own right*, not simply as a means, but as an end of our activity. In that case, its existence as independent is a part of our happiness.

Thus, the creative worker (as opposed to the person whose work is just a means for his own money, advancement, or whatever) is a *lover*, and the result of his work has an eternal dimension, because it *as real* is part of the worker's eternal reality.

Christianizing work

Notice that the layman, who takes over God's creative attitude toward the material universe, is essentially the creative worker. And from what we just said, it would seem to follow that *the material universe as lovingly transformed will not pass away, but will on the last day receive its eternal form from the choices of those who lovingly worked on it.*

"Now I am making everything new," says the Master in *Revelation* at the point of the entrance of the eternal New Jerusalem.

And if our analysis this far is correct, this "new" making is the making the Master has done *through us*, and through our loving creativity on the world. The world, then—the eternal world that exists forever after the last day, our eternal environment—will not be something *given* to us, but something *we have made for ourselves*, just as the self we will be will be the self we *chose* ourselves to be, not something given to us that we didn't actively want beforehand. Of course, with all this is the divine life we will share insofar as we care

about God as God; but the person who lives (in this finite way) God's life will be the person we chose in this life to be, no more and no less; and the environment we live in will be the environment we chose to make as ours, neither more nor less.

It seems that this rather mystical analysis of work has led us to a fairly remarkable conclusion. God's "plan" for the eternal, unchanging material world we will inhabit is in fact *our* plan for the world we *choose* to live in; it is no less than this, but no more either. Thus, if *we* don't want more than a world that is barely tolerable, we won't have more than this eternally; if we try to make our world as beautiful and comfortable and enjoyable a place as we can, then this will be the environment that will surround us forever. God is not mocked. Just as he will not give the "righteous" person who never sins but never tries to develop himself anything more than this minimally significant human life he has chosen, so if we don't want any more for our world than that it be bearable, it will not be transformed into a palace.

The medieval notion of Christianity assumed that we will simply be given (because of God's generosity) a heaven that we didn't bother to do anything to achieve, when we could have been working to transform this world into a beautiful place. The medievals affected to despise "this world" and "material pleasures" and all the rest of it, as something if not evil, then dangerous, and at the very least, "low" and "beneath the notice of a true Christian."

But in so doing, they missed the point of the fact that, as Paul said, "we know that every creature has been in pain and anguish along with every other one up to now; and not only that, but we too, even though we have the firstfruits of the Spirit, are having pain until we are adopted as son and our whole body is set free. We have been rescued—but in hope."

Along with ourselves, the world, the material world, is waiting to be redeemed. And it is we who will do it, by re-creating it with the love of the Master: the Master's infinite creative love for the whole material universe. *He* loves the "low" objects in the material world,

and loves them infinitely, and creates them and works on them and transforms them and lifts them beyond themselves—not for any “purpose” that he wants to use them for for his own “increase,” but simply so that they can be fully what they can be. If my Master loves these objects infinitely, should I despise them? If he has been “working up to now,” as John says, shouldn’t I say with Jesus, “Then I am working too”?

This is our sublime vocation as laymen: to make a difference in the world; to make the world (some corner of it) different; and by loving it, to make an *eternal* difference in it.

Note that *this* is precisely what is ignored by those people who think that to be a “real Christian” you have to get involved in helping out in the parish. Let me say again that there is nothing wrong with helping out in the parish, distributing Communion, singing in the choir, and so on; but it is *not* the layman’s “true Christian activity.” His activity *as* a Christian layman is to transform the world and give the material universe an eternal divine-human aspect.

But there is still more. Notice that the *choice itself* implies the goal; and if this goal is not realized here, it will be realized hereafter. For instance, the person who has set as a goal for himself to be learned, say, in philosophy will (I have discovered) fail in this life, because there is too much to learn for one short lifetime, and too many blind alleys to get lost in. A philosopher can scratch the surface and grope around, no more. But if this goal—which has nothing contradictory about it—of learning the real truth about life and its meaning cannot be fulfilled in this life, *it must be fulfilled in the next, or the person is in hell; the meaning of his life is unachieved and now unachievable*. Hence, each of us will be all of the (non-self-contradictory) things we *choose* to be, whether we achieve this here or not.

This also applies to those goals we have in love for the material universe. If, like Martin Luther King, one of the goals of my life is that Black people will not be despised and will have the same

opportunities as Whites in our country, then either I will be eternally frustrated or this goal will some day actually be realized—provided it is consistent with the nature of Blacks and Whites, as it certainly seems to be.

So it is *having* the goal which guarantees its achievement, *not* the actions you perform to achieve it; because if these actions fail, the goal is still there, and must be achieved after death.

In fact, the loving creator can almost guarantee that he will fail, in this life. We just don't know enough or have enough time to achieve anything significant in our lives—and there is so much to be done! Even Jesus, failed in his work, which was to make us understand what God's salvation really meant. No one during his life understood what he meant, as can be seen from the Last Supper conversations recorded by John. It was only after he came back to life—actually, only after he left and sent the Spirit, that it began to dawn on his students what he was actually trying to say. The cross of the layman is the fact that his ambitions for the world are not achieved by his feeble actions.

But the cross leads to the resurrection and makes no sense without it. The function of the *actions* we perform to transform the world is that *they confirm that the goals we have are real ones, and are not simply dreams. It is the goals that, in the eternal scheme, do the creative work; it is the work that establishes that the goals are serious and real.* That is the way work achieves its goal.

Note the difference here between the Christian worker and the atheist worker. The atheist, who believes that there is no life after death in which the legitimate goals of one's life will necessarily be fulfilled, must take *what he actually accomplishes* as what makes the *real* difference in this world; the goal is simply for the sake of the accomplishment; if the accomplishment measures up to it, then the person is lucky; if it does not, then what he had in mind was an impossible dream, and he must content himself with what was actually done. Thus, on the supposition of the atheist, all Martin Luther King, Jr. accomplished was that insignificant start toward Black equality,

and it is almost certain that now that his eloquence is missing, the lofty aim will die for lack of nourishment.

That is, the hope of the atheist lies in his assessment of his actual power, and a kind of trust in luck—very often a blind trust that has the facts against it. Any realistic atheist would say that he should set goals that are “realistic” and can reasonably be expected to be achieved. Why beat your head against a wall for (a) something that won’t do *you* any good in the first place, and (b) something that the odds are against in the second place?

And when all is said and done, for the atheist, the goals he achieves are ephemeral. Another will come along and undo with his own goals the goals the noble atheist worked so hard for. The environmentalist will stop pollution until we have a few generations of a pollution-free environment and forget what a benefit this is, and once again decide to seek “progress” at the expense of the world we live in. The anti-nuclear activist may succeed in dismantling nuclear weapons. What is his hope that no one will build any again once they are dismantled?

But the Christian knows that his *goal* is eternal, and is the operative act, really; the work simply makes the goal real. You have to work, but the feeble accomplishments of the work itself don’t do the job; God does the job *because we chose that it be done*. The Christian is confident that his goals will be achieved if they are not self-contradictory—and if they are self-contradictory, he is content not to have them achieved, because he knows that such goals *ought* not to be achieved.

The Christian is not wedded to his goals, because the goals are not for *his* sake; he cares about what he is working on, not simply as a means to his own self-development. If the actual goal he chooses turns out to be contrary to the nature of what he is working on, he always has the implicit goal behind it of “whatever really is good for this object,” and is willing to defer to God’s greater knowledge.

To take the Black movement again, obviously the equality of Blacks in the sense envisioned by Martin Luther King, Jr. was not

something that in the nature of things could happen soon; and it probably isn't happening in the way he envisioned it. What does that matter? It is not right to violate nature to achieve a goal, and if the world can't get to the place desired soon without violating some part of it, then the end doesn't justify the means, and it will have to wait. There is no absolute, objective evil; wrongs do not *have* to be righted. The world will get there some day, in its own way; and that is what matters.

For the atheist, what happens matters, and matters desperately; for the Christian, what happens matters, but not desperately, because the Christian recognizes the subjectivity of "what matters," and can cope with it; and the Christian has hope that the goal—the real goal—will be achieved, whatever happens.

But this does not imply passivity in the Christian, simply "conforming oneself to the will of God" and letting things be done. That is the fallacy of medieval Christianity once again. The medieval Christian looked on this world the way a renter looks on his apartment. It isn't really his, and he's just living in it temporarily; it belongs to someone else. He tries to take care of it, to be sure, but when something goes wrong, he calls up the landlord and says, "Will you fix this, please?" and sits back and waits for it to be done for him—and complains if it isn't.

The atheist and the Christian I am describing consider that the world is something that we *own*. For the atheist, there's no landlord to call to fix the leaky faucet; if he doesn't fix it, it won't get fixed. For the Christian, the bank that owns the lien on the house isn't going to fix the faucet either; and if the owner doesn't fix it, it won't get fixed; but the banker is ready with a loan and advice on how to fix it. As long as the attempt is made to fix the faucet, it will be fixed, because the owner is not alone.

In one sense, if this analysis of the Christian dimension of work is true, it is terribly important that we work on the world and have goals for it; because if we don't have goals that translate themselves into

work (and only have dreams that are the equivalent of calling the landlord), then things that we “desire” won’t get done. In another sense, it isn’t important at all that we work on the world—because it isn’t objectively *important* that the world be a beautiful place eternally; the world can be whatever we want it to be, and God is perfectly satisfied. Importance is subjective. For God, nothing is important.

I consider, for instance, one phase of my work as a Christian writing this book, because I think that what I have to write is true, and it would be a very useful thing for the world and for Christians in it to be able to have this information and use it for their own Christian development. But there is no *absolute* sense in which this *must* be published and in which people *must* be informed of what I am saying here. Perhaps I am wrong; then wouldn’t it be better if these words never see the light? Why have hundreds of Christians rushing off down another blind alley?

And since this view is so very different from everything I hear around me, which is all about “fulfillment” and how “important” we are in God’s eyes, and how God “wants” social justice even if revolutions are to be waged to get it, and so on and so on; then there is very little realistic hope that this book will even be read by anyone during my lifetime, let alone be a best-seller and change the way of thinking of generation after generation—which is my ambition.

But I can’t just have my ideas and pray that they be spread through the world, without giving the world a chance to find out what they are. My ideas in my head remain in my head; even if they are inspired by God Almighty, they remain in my head unless I *choose* to express them in such a way that others can hear them and evaluate them according to their own inspirations. If I refuse to do this, and then ask God to do it for me, then I am dreaming and not working; and he will not do it, because I don’t really want it done. It is not important from his point of view that it be done; he has not “chosen me as his instrument” in the sense that he “wants” to use me for a work of his, not mine.

On the other hand, seeing where this age is and what it needs—hope and self-forgetfulness, love—I think I *have* been chosen as God’s instrument, and what I say has been, as it were, put into me for the sake of new opportunities to advance from where we are without going back to the middle ages and without simply struggling in the quicksand we are in and only sinking deeper. But my “instrumentality” is secondary, as it were, to my ambitions; it simply is not objectively important that what I am the instrument for should be accomplished. It is to be accomplished *if it is my ambition to accomplish it; if I have this as a goal I work for*; if not, it is not one of God’s “goals.”

My cross, if you want to consider it that way, is that I don’t see the work’s accomplishing anything until after I die, when I believe I will view the eternal fulfillment of the ambition I have for the world, and will rejoice with my Master, who alone, in the last analysis, matters. Not even my rejoicing matters. So I write this, hopeful that it will do some good, but being almost certain that I won’t live to see the good. And I think that it’s probably better for me not to see my ideas spread during my lifetime, because this would probably mean their trivialization on television talk shows and so on. Can a “celebrity” really accomplish what I would like to accomplish? And could he do it without also accomplishing his own damnation? So I am content. I have no particular desire to be regarded as brilliant, let alone brilliant and eccentric; what I want is for what I say to be regarded as true—*if it is true*; and I certainly have no desire to be regarded as a saint—now, at least, when I am not one. Later, after I die, and have by God’s miraculous activity become one. There is plenty of time for that.

The point, of course, is that it is the goal itself that is what operates, if I am right; and it operates eternally. The work is to confirm the goal as such; and if the goal is very lofty—and why shouldn’t it be?—then the life of the worker is the cross, and the resurrection happens after he dies. We have no need to set “realistic”

goals, in the sense of what we believe we can in this life realize by our actions. We can stoop to the folly of believing that legitimate goals that are enormous and beyond our poor power here and now can be achieved. The only real folly is to set goals that are in principle impossible, that don't respect the nature of the person acting or the objects acted on.

In this sense, the Christian is a fool. He will choose to become an actor, because he wants to say something to the world through drama—though he knows that it is a hundred to one or more against his actually succeeding in getting roles, however good he is. He will choose to be a physicist, because he sees that there is much to be learned about our material universe, and he is not daunted by the fact that only the Newtons and Einsteins have made a real dent in this knowledge. He will choose to be a businessman, confident that if he does this, it will some day be possible for business to get itself out of the economic contradictions it has got itself into, and if he doesn't try to run a business on the principle of providing the best service to the consumer and decent work for the workers and using profit as only a reasonable compensation for this, then who will? He is not afraid of the greed of the others and the greater efficiency it implies. His act is eternal, not just here.

Let me close this section by remarking that all three states of the Christian life work; but the work looks different in each one of them. The fact that all do work should not be surprising; we are all a kind of mixture of the Trinity of the three states of life, because God's Triune attitude is actually one. But still, the focus is different in each case.

Chartres would be an example of the kind of Religious attitude toward work. The goal in this case was to have the material of the cathedral reveal God in the world and lift people's minds to God. And it is seeing the relation of God to the world and the world to God that is essentially the Religious attitude.

Further, the Religious works as a sacrifice. The labor and effort that he does is to show himself that he cares more about God than about

his own comfort. In this sense, what the Religious *does* to the world is not important; if he farms, if he illuminates manuscripts, if he studies seismology, if he teaches, his attitude is that the transformation of the world—the “good” that he does—is secondary to the work as a *sign* that he loves God and that he loves God *in* what he is working on. He has given up “care” about the world as a goal of his life; the world reveals God to him, and he takes it into himself to praise God through it. Not that it is a means, exactly; he respects it as God’s creation. But he respects it as such, he does not, as Religious, *create* it as such.

The priest, of course, works to spread the Kingdom; the world is his goal; but it is basically the world of people who do not yet know of the redemption, or who have not taken full advantage of it, and who must be given the opportunity. If he works on the material universe, then as a priest, this is a means toward helping people understand what Jesus’ activity was all about and how to take advantage of it. If he engages in social work with people, this is a propaedeutic to lifting them to think about the next world and see the salvation that awaits them (on the grounds, for instance, that you can’t think about heaven if you’re starving). If he keeps the books of the parish, this is so that the parish can function in its role of providing the opportunity of salvation to the parishoners.

This is not to say that priests don’t care about the world for its own sake, any more than to say that Religious are using the world purely and simply as a kind of veil through which to see their Master. Any real person is a mixture of all three states of life, as I have said so often. What I am saying here is that the priest’s work *as* a priest is that of providing the opportunity for salvation to everyone; and everything he does *as* a priest is a means to that end. And the Religious works on the world *as* a Religious so that it will reveal itself as the glory of God, and the relation between it and the world will appear. For the Religious, this relation is the goal; the world “in itself” is not. For the priest, the world is the goal, but only the world of those to be

redeemed.

But for the layman, the world itself is the goal. It is not that the layman's goal is to have his corner of the world speak about God; it is that it become what it can be made to become: that greater, glorious object which the world as worked on by a man who has God's infinite respect and love for it can help it to be. The Religious plants a garden as partly the penance of labor, and partly so that the growing plants can reveal the wonders of God, who gives life so abundantly. He loves God in the plants. The priest plants a garden so that there will be food for those who can be fed and so be brought to listen to the Word, or so that there can be flowers to help people understand the beauty of the Word. He loves the garden for what it can do for souls. The layman plants a garden so that the plants can grow as well as they can grow. He loves the garden the way the Creator loves it.

They tell the story of the preacher who called on a gardener who had bought a garden a year ago, and who was working hard on it. "I see you and the Lord have beautiful land here," he said. The farmer replied, "Yes? You should have seen it when the Lord had it all to himself."

There is something of the lay attitude in that. God will not create the world into something marvelous "by himself"; it takes humans who love the world to do that—because that is the way he created the world, for us to re-create it "with him." And if we love it as God loves it, then the layman's ambition for the garden creates an eternal garden that is all that it could be because of his ambition for it; and it is part of our eternal environment.

Who is to say that any one of these attitudes to work is any "better" than any other? Each is noble, each is capable of perversion, each is Christian. They are different in kind, not in degree. Those who have the priestly attitude and think everything should be subordinated to the salvation of souls should not look down on those who care about God's world simply because it exists, and who simply want it to

be fully what it can be. That is the way God himself cares about it; one of the ways.

The Christian scientist

At this point, what I would like to do is go very briefly through a number of fields of work, to show where I think the Christian dimension might lie, and how the Christian attitude can transform them. If my analysis of things is right, then first of all, the Christian's work will not be any less than the atheist's, and in fact should be more consistent with the nature of what he is working on than the atheist's, and will not be any less this-worldly than the atheist. But the Christian, first of all, can be happier at his work, and is capable of doing a better job than the atheist. His work should be able to come into its full reality because of his attitude toward it, in a way that the atheist's work cannot.

Let me begin, then, with considering what it means to take a Christian attitude toward science—theoretical science, now, not applied science, which I will treat under the head of engineering.

The first thing to note is that the theoretical scientist tends to justify his existence to the non-scientist (whom, interestingly, he calls the "layman," as if he were the priest of a new religion) in terms of engineering, saying that it is he who provides the information by which the engineer controls our environment. And this may be *one of* the goals of theoretical science, but it is not necessarily *the* goal; and it is very often the case that theoretical scientists have very little interest in what their discoveries can be used for. We even hear theorists exculpating themselves of blame for nuclear bombs or germ warfare on the grounds that they just found the knowledge, and it was none of their business what use it was put to. We even have theoreticians who countenance horrible things like the experimentations the Nazis performed on prisoners because it "advances knowledge."

Knowledge, from one point of view, can be used as a means for changing the world; but from another point of view it is an end in itself, since it is human activity—and, in fact, as Aristotle pointed out, it is the most characteristic and the highest of human activities (because it, along with choosing, are the purely spiritual activities that humans and only humans among bodies can perform). Hence, knowledge *needs* no justification; it is complete in itself, even when it *can* be used for a further purpose.

The Christian scientist, of course, recognizes this; and he also recognizes the uses to which knowledge can be put. He does not subordinate one to the other: “useless” knowledge is not for him worthless, but he does not sneer at “useful” knowledge as beneath his notice. He can pursue his interest without having to “justify” it somehow.

The Christian attitude of respect for knowledge and the world that is known, however, will help him to be a *moral* scientist. There are certain facts that *must not be discovered*, not because there is anything bad about the knowledge, but because the only way we can discover them is by violating reality. For instance, it might be possible to discover a way of transplanting a fetus from a mother who cannot bring him to term to a woman who can; but in order to do this, the experiments would involve putting many fetuses lives in danger and probably killing many. The knowledge would be a benefit to human beings; but the only practical way to acquire it will involve killing human beings. *In vitro* fertilization (test tube babies) currently involves fertilizing many eggs only one or two of whom will be used for implantation: bringing many humans into existence only to die, so that one can survive. The same goes for things like embryonic stem-cell research when it means killing embryos for the sake of the cells. Genetic engineering promises many benefits; but are we sure (given especially that new organisms can be patented) that the safeguards against new viruses worse than AIDS won't be launched on the world? And if there is a doubt, does the end (the knowledge) justify the

means?

Science is amoral—neither moral nor immoral. There is nothing wrong as such with the acquisition of knowledge. But this is not to say that *scientists* can be amoral. A scientist who sees that the only way to acquire some knowledge is to violate the reality of something is morally bound not to take that route, and if it means never having the knowledge, then so be it. A scientist who has *reason to believe* that what he discovers will be used (given human nature) for destructive purposes (even if it can also be used constructively, like nuclear energy), is morally bound not to make the discovery, or having made it, not to make it known.

The Christian has the advantage over the atheist in this respect, because for the Christian the knowledge is not all there is in the world; because it is the end of *his* life, it is not objectively absolutely important, because the Christian recognizes that importance is subjective, not objective, and he does not see himself and his goals as important. For the Christian, knowledge of the world is a part of his respect for it; and to violate it out of “respect” for it is a blatant contradiction, which he can avoid without pain. In the last analysis, what does it matter if we know this or that?

But as I have said so often, Christianity is not a means of helping us to be moral; it happens that the Christian attitude here makes morality easier, but that is not its “purpose.” The Christian saint is not the morally virtuous person; not that he will try to be immoral, but that isn’t what Christianity is about.

Note, by the way, that if immoral experiments are performed (by others) and knowledge is gained by them, the Christian will not shun this knowledge as “tainted.” It is not for us to judge others; and there is nothing wrong with the knowledge itself. I think that if the scientists in the ’forties had been Christians in my sense of the term, there would be no knowledge of the application of $E=mc^2$; but this is not to say that we can’t rejoice in the fact that we *have* the knowledge and can now build upon it in positive directions.

At any rate, those who make the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian scientist that one is moral and the other isn't miss the point that the non-Christian can be just as moral (I only said it was *easier* for the Christian), and have seen only the most superficial of the aspects of the scientist as Christian.

The Christian scientist and dogma

Let me treat here what non-Christian, especially atheist, scientists consider the greatest drawback to being Christian: If you are Christian, and especially if you are Catholic, there are a number of dogmas you have to adhere to as facts, and this is simple prejudice (accepting facts without evidence), which (a) is going to blind you to any line of investigation which will tend to contradict your "facts," and (b) creates an attitude antithetical to good science, which is never to accept anything at all "on faith."

The Christian, precisely because he *has* a set of dogmas he is conscious of, actually has an *advantage* over the atheist in this area. Why? Consider: *Why* should one "never accept anything 'on faith'"? What evidence is there to support that you're *more* likely to be wrong by accepting something "on faith" than by "seeing for yourself"? Well, it "stands to reason." It does indeed; but in the last analysis, the scientist can't give *evidence* that not accepting things on faith is more likely to make you go wrong; he just accepts *this* "on faith." Is reason *really* reliable? Is seeing reliable? Is it more reliable than other forms of acquiring information? Is *measurement* the best way to "see for yourself," or does it itself distort the information? (There's evidence to support this, by the way, even in physics.)

The point, first of all, is, of course, that the scientist accepts a great deal "on faith": that there is something "out there" that he is observing; that he will never find a real contradiction; that nature behaves in a reasonably constant way; that arguing inductively actually allows you to predict events that haven't occurred; that if what you see

doesn't make sense without something unseen, then that unseen event (or something like it) happened (as that the dinosaur bones mean that there must have been enormous animals, whether they were true reptiles or not). And so on. And there are dogmas that are unquestioned and simply false, such as that if something is real, it can be measured, that morality has no factuality to it but is simply emotions or societal attitudes, and so forth.

The scientist also does not check on many of the things he is taught. Having got fairly far in physics, I know that the experiments physics students do in the labs only check out a minuscule amount of what they're learning in the textbooks; and also, if your experiment comes up with a result that differs widely from the standard answer, you rework your data until you get what Rutherford or Faraday found; you don't question *their* work. So you take your professor's and the textbook's word for it that he isn't lying and that he (or whoever he is relying on) did the experiments that meant that *that person* "saw for himself." You'd never get anywhere in any science if you questioned absolutely everything that was said; and so the "real" scientific attitude that "I've got to see for myself" is a recipe for stagnating at the very beginning. If science doesn't *build on* what previous scientists have done, but persists in checking and rechecking in case there's been a hoax, then science makes no progress. Hence, science *rests* on faith (taking someone's word for it that "this is what I saw").

But how different is this from taking John's word for it that "this is being reported by an eye-witness who knows of his own knowledge the facts he is reporting; it was written so that you would believe that it is true"? And this same John reports Jesus as saying, "Amen amen I tell you, I am speaking of what I know and giving evidence about what I have seen; and you people do not accept what I say." Jesus here is asserting that *he* has had first-hand knowledge of what he is talking about, and to prove it, he performs acts that no known natural agency can perform, including coming back to life. In order to say

that this is false, you have to hold either (a) that the evangelists like John didn't actually put down (or control) what allegedly they wrote, (b) were lying, or (c) were mistaken.

Now an atheist simply accepts that (a), (b), or (c) or some combination is the case; but it turns out that, if you investigate this, you run into serious difficulties with such a position. I am not going to enter into apologetics here; my point is that the atheist takes it *on faith* that *of course* Jesus didn't really come back to life or perform the miracles; *of course* this is just legend, and it's naive to believe anything else. Why bother investigating anything so obvious? It *couldn't* have happened, and therefore of course it didn't, and the explanation of the Gospel accounts is that they are some kind of delusion or myth.

The atheistic scientist is burdened with a whole carload of dogmas which he can give no evidence to prove, and often not even to support; but he does not realize this. He is therefore much more likely to be a victim to dogmatic blindness than the person who adheres to dogmas, knowing that (a) they cannot be proved, but (b) there is reason supporting them and nothing that *disproves* them.

And it is simply not true that the Christian will not pursue avenues that seem to lead in directions that contradict his faith. I can testify to this from my own experience; as a philosopher, it is my duty to see what can be known from the observable evidence in front of me, whatever I happen *a priori* to believe; and it has not seldom occurred that I came to a conclusion that *seemed* contrary to what I was taught from my religious teachers. The whole theory of good and evil that is the foundation of this book seems, on first encounter, to be the most anti-Christian view of the world you could name; but on deeper investigation, I think it lights up both experience and the words of Jesus and the Catholic tradition in a marvelous manner.

And what I am here saying is not that I am right on this particular point of good and evil, but that the Christian can *confidently* pursue lines of evidence that seem contrary to the dogmas he holds, because he holds these dogmas, not as something whose "alleged truth" must

never be brought into question, but simply as *facts*, which of course are not going to be shown not to be facts. A fact is a fact, however you know it.

Science is not something for the Christian to be afraid of, because it can never contradict Christian truth. How could it? How could the Christian be *worse off* for having *more* evidence than the atheist? Of course, the atheist doesn't believe he has more evidence, but that's the atheist's problem, not the Christian's.

And it is a real problem (partly because a hidden one) for the atheist; because *he* is so convinced that Christianity is *false* that he will not consider evidence that would tend to support it. When scientists bring up the "big bang" origin of the universe (for which there is a good deal of evidence) and this implies that the initial moment of the universe was a condition of *radical instability*, they immediately stop and refuse to draw conclusions "as scientists." As *scientists!* Science is *built* on the *refusal* simply to "stop" at something that doesn't make sense. If the initial moment of the universe was unstable, so that it exploded, then (a) it either existed stably beforehand and *something else* got it into instability, or (b) there *wasn't* any universe beforehand, in which case something else brought it into existence, or (c) it is in some kind of "pulsating stability" where it alternately expands and collapses. Alternative (c) is testable, and doesn't seem to have the weight of the evidence (total mass of the universe) in its favor. Which leaves (a) or (b) or abandon the theory altogether. But to accept (a) or (b) leads to something *beyond* the material universe (which, by the way, might not be anything like the Christian God); but that way lies "religion," and that's not "scientific."

What I am saying here is that a "dogmatic" adherence to dogmas (in the sense of a *fear* that if you looked hard enough you might find out that they were false) is as endemic a disease in the scientific community as it is in the Christian; and that in either case, it is pernicious to objectivity of investigation. But the atheist is worse off for two reasons: first, that he doesn't believe that he is following

unsupported dogmas; and second, that there is no *reason* why these dogmas should actually be true; they are just “procedural rules” that were invented by—of all people—philosophers a couple of centuries ago that more or less work. The Christian, on the other hand, knows he believes; and if he is intelligent, he knows why he believes, and that it is not unreasonable to believe as he does. He has nothing to be afraid of.

Submission to the facts

Now then, what is the scientist as a scientist actually doing? Many of them think of their work as “unlocking the secrets of nature,” as if the world were trying to hide information from us, and we clever ones were cheating it into revealing what it is trying to hide.

But the Christian realizes that “it is not in our stars, but in ourselves” that we are ignorant. The world is speaking, not trying to hide anything; it is we, who have our ears tuned in to the wrong station, who can’t hear what is being said. We look at stones and pieces of cotton falling to the ground, and we expect heavy things to fall faster than light things; and superficial observation confirms us in this (Try the experiment; the stone will hit the ground before the cotton ball). Galileo discovered that if you can eliminate air resistance, then the heavy things we can drop fall at the same rate of acceleration as light things. But he did this because he wanted to show that the earth didn’t have to be at the center of the universe; but if heavy things fall faster than light things, Aristotle’s earth-centered theory would have to be correct.

The point here is that Galileo discovered the law of falling bodies, *not* by “probing deeper into their secrets” than anyone else, *but by shifting his own focus*, which enabled him to *look for* something no one else had thought of looking for; and all he did when he rolled the balls down the inclined plane was look at what was there for everyone to see.

So the Christian, who already has had practice shifting his point of view, and the Christian layman, who has had practice shifting his point of view to agree with the way things *are* and not the way they *ought* to be, has a large head-start on the atheist or even the non-lay-Christian scientist. It is so easy to see what you want to see that you have to be careful that you don't have any very strong "wants." Stephen Jay Gould in *The Mismeasure of Man* makes this point, in connection with the attempt to prove that white people were essentially superior to other races: very detailed measurements of skulls left out certain data (like the size of the whole skeleton to which they were attached) which made the scientists think that white people had larger-capacity heads than non-whites. Gould himself mentions that as he was checking these data, his own desire to show that the earlier research was false led him to "fudge" his own findings unconsciously in the other direction.

But the Christian layman hasn't got any special thing he wants to prove. He isn't interested, as such, in finding evidence that God made whatever he is investigating, or that God is good, or that Jesus rose from the dead, or whatever. Even if he investigates the Shroud of Turin, what he, as a lay Christian would be interested in is finding what the Shroud *is*, not in proving that it was the shroud that covered Jesus. So far, for instance, it has been established that the negative image on it must have been made in some way by a dead body whose wounds and so on are similar to what Jesus is reported to have undergone. But even if all the data are consistent with its being the shroud of Jesus, it could still, as Raymond Brown has pointed out, be a shroud covering someone who was crucified in imitation of Jesus—possibly as part of a persecution of his followers. So what? Father Brown has, I think, the kind of attitude I am speaking of, both in this and in his investigations into Sacred Scripture. It is that he is trying to see what the evidence leads to, not trying to make it lead somewhere. That is, he is listening.

And that is what the scientist is, in the last analysis: a listener. And

the Christian scientist is a listener; the Religious to God as he speaks through his creation, the priest to creation as it tells people of what God is like and encourages them to believe in him and be saved and happy, and the layman to creation, not because God speaks through it, but because it is God's and worthy of listening to for its own sake. The Religious listens to find the relation of God to his world; the priestly scientist to know it so he can use it to bring others to the fath; but the layman listens in God's way; in Jesus' way: he submits to it, and simply lets it speak.

And this involves, as I said, changing himself so that he can hear it. True, it involves experiments, isolating certain aspects of the world so that we can see what they do when they are not disturbed by other aspects; but all of this is because we are too weak to be able to sort such things out by ourselves in the complexities of real interactions—so even the experiments are really changing ourselves and the conditions of our listening so that we can hear.

The Christian scientist, resting on faith, has no trouble with the scientist's ultimate act of faith, that reality cannot really be a contradiction, and therefore every problem of theoretical science is ultimately solvable. He also realizes that if he can't find the solution here in this life, this does not mean that the world is absurd, but only that he has not hit upon the proper focus; but this doesn't bother him, because, like every scientist, he knows that there *is* the proper focus; and he, as a Christian, knows that if he doesn't find it in this life, he will find it after he dies. Thus he has a faith that the atheist cannot have, and a hope and confidence that is beyond the atheist.

And he has a love for the universe he listens to that is different from the atheist's—who usually loves the world also. The atheist's love is that of a superior to something beneath him; the Christian recognizes the difference, but it does not matter to him. He can devote his life to the study of the swimming mechanism of the paramecium or to some totally “useless” endeavor that is “beneath” him, because his “dignity” does not paralyze him, though he

recognizes it.

No, it is really the Christian who can be objective, because he can afford to be. And he can be happy, because he doesn't have to make the great discovery in this life: that the world is what it is, and that he knows it and eventually will know his corner of it fully, is enough for him.

The Christian engineer

Insofar as the theoretical scientist sees how his discoveries can be applied, he has a relation toward engineering; and the Christian, of course, has not only the moral one I mentioned, but is also aware of being the person who can suggest ways of making our lives better, and still more, the person who can indicate to those who would change things what restraints reality puts on their pursuit of their goals.

But what of the person who applies science to this alteration of the world: what of the technologist? I once contributed a chapter to a book on Christianity and technology; and much of the book was concerned with the supposed anti-Christian nature of technology, and how we can combat it. I think this attitude misses the point, and is itself anti-Christian.

The fear of technology—expressed in the antipathy we find toward computers, more than anything else, perhaps—has two sources, I think. First, there is the worry that perhaps the scientists are right and all we are are machines like computers, and therefore computers will some day “take over,” and secondly, we are being made the slaves of these machines, and they are making us do all sorts of things.

As to the first, I, as a philosopher-scientist, see how foolish this 2001-induced terror is. It is simply amazing the things that very competent scientists don't see because of the focus they have. To say that a biological organism is a machine ignores the obvious fact that the organism exists at a *high* energy level which is *physically and chemically unstable*, and *spontaneously maintains this energy level*. Now

if the level is unstable physically, how can it be maintained from within? You have a stable instability, speaking physico-chemically, which is a contradiction in terms.

And to be able to see *what the relation is* among two items which are connected means that the relating-function (whatever it is) has to do itself over in one single act (has to be doubly itself, so that it can observe what it is doing); and this is simply impossible for a form of energy—though we do it all the time.

No, computers can't think, and they aren't alive; it isn't that they're basically thinking but at a primitive level (and therefore with greater sophistication, they'll get better than we are); it's that they're very sophisticated already, much more so in some narrowly defined respects than we are, but on an entirely different plane from thinking, and there is no way they can even approach what we do when we think, because that is spiritual, and infinitely beyond energy.

I can almost hear you say as you read this, "Yes, but that's what all the people said before the great scientific advances; and how are you so sure?" Let me point out that you think this because of the *faith* that has been drilled into you of the "infinite progress of knowledge" that what can't be done simply can't be done *now*, which implies, when all is said and done, that we're really not finite, and there is nothing that is ultimately impossible for us if we can just figure out the way.

Now it is *that* attitude that is anti-Christian "technologism"; it has nothing to do with technology itself; it is simply an act of faith that we are not finite. And the remedy? Christian faith, which refuses to submit to the negative argument that "we can't do it" always means "we can't do it *now* but it's *possible* we'll do it tomorrow." There is and *can be* no evidence to support this argument; it is a pure dogma of this-worldly atheism, an act of the blindest faith.

The person who has this faith (and I know, because many of my students have it), when he is confronted with the evidence—of which there is a good deal—that human thought is a spiritual act and cannot

be described with numbers the way a form of energy can, will not accept the evidence, not because he has any to rebut it, not because I haven't shown what the scientific data is on this point and how it skirts the real issue, but because I would presume to say that it implies that we can never build a computer than can think—and he will not allow that there is something that cannot in principle be done by us.

This skepticism, this worry that if you make a statement that X cannot be done or that X is absolutely true, then you just *might* be wrong, that we can never *really* know anything absolutely for sure, is of course something that contradicts itself. How can you be so sure that we can know nothing with absolute certainty? I have had students doubt the statement “There is something,” even when I pointed out that the doubt itself isn't nothing—so that there is no point of view from which that statement could be false—because there would then be at least the point of view, which is *something*.

But even so, they are so filled with the faith that we *can't* really know anything with absolute certainty—they are so absolutely certain of this—that they will entertain absolute nonsense to maintain it.

This particular skepticism is the reverse of the coin of the American atheist's technologistic faith, that we can do anything: “The difficult we do right away; the impossible takes a little longer.” You can't believe in the impossible-in-practice if you believe that anything is absolutely true. But of course, this faith, which is based on the skepticism (the *fear* that you might be wrong if you made an “absolutely true” statement) leads to the *fear* of technology; because if anything can be done, then it just *might* be, and the machines might take over after all.

But the Christian has changed his way of thinking. He knows he is finite, and is not devastated by it; he can accept that he can't do everything, but by the same token that he can do—and know—some things; and he can look at evidence and see where it leads and come to conclusions that he can be (finitely) confident of, and can recognize his own human limitations on his activity, and not be worried that he

is going to wreck himself.

The psalmist wrote millennia ago, “Unless YHWH guards the city, the watchmen’s vigilance is a waste of time.” The worry that we are going to mess things up is nothing new. True, they had swords and boiling oil then, and sieges and starving people into submission, and we have nuclear weapons; but only the scale is different; the principle is the same. Either we are running and therefore ruining things, or our Master is running the universe; he is watching the city—yes, even now. What are we worried about?

The main difference between the “practical” atheist and the Christian engineer—which, includes, of course, anyone who applies theoretical knowledge—is that the atheist believes that he is the one in control; and if he knows anything, he knows how tenuous that control is, and he worries. The Christian believes that the Master of the Universe is in control, and that, while we can ruin the world *if we deliberately choose to do so, or if we refuse to take reasonable precautions*, still He will not leave us victims of our ignorance, still less leave the world a victim to it.

That is, just as the Master will help you toward damnation if that is what you want, and will not save you if you deliberately “remain ignorant” and do the things that would damn you that you might have qualms about if you knew—God is not mocked—still, God is not either indifferent or a spider waiting to pounce once we have touched his web. He will help each of us gain the eternal life we want, to the extent to which we want to share it; and all of our ignorance, and even our perversity, will contribute, in the last analysis, toward the goal we wish to attain. This is our faith, is it not?

Well then, why are we worried that it is *we* who will ruin our environment; that we must be nervous and fearful that we will wreck our world and enslave future generations to a horrendous technology that we cannot control and will control us? Where is your faith? If God can save you from your sins, can he not save you from your computers? If God will lead you to the realms of glory while you

struggle with him day after day, will he leave the world to the idiocy of the unenlightened (who just happen to have preempted the word “enlightened” as if you could be “enlightened” without the Light of the World)? If he is asleep in the stern of the boat, it does not mean that he is not creating the storm, and that he’s going to let the boat sink.

So the Christian has nothing to fear from technology; it will not enslave us, unless we want it to; and those of us who know this and pray to keep us from the pigheaded silliness of those who will not because they cannot see, will prevail.

We won’t seem to. This, I think, is the burden of *Revelation*. The Church, and Christians in general, will always be failing; and their failure will be their success, just as the success of their Master was the failure of the cross. But we should not let the wood of the cross blind us to the Body upon it; that failure *is* success. We won’t “win,” perhaps, because the battle is so one-sided that the “enemy” is defeated before it even starts; they just look as if they’ve won. This is your faith, after all; believe it.

Given that faith, then the Christian layman can look at technology for what it is: a tool that can be used to make our life more livable, and our world more itself. It will change the face of the earth—of course. That is what we are here for, isn’t it, to transform the world? Not to adapt ourselves to the environment, but to make the environment over unto our own image and likeness, and the image and likeness of the Crucified so that we and our environment on the last day will be Resurrected.

Because the hope of the Christian layman is the faith that this world—as it now exists—will pass away, but the *world* will not pass away; and the eternal environment we will inhabit will be the one we have chosen, when the Master “makes everything new.” Just as our bodies now are seeds and the Resurrected body is the plant which will grow from that seed, so the world in history is the seed of the New Jerusalem, which is the same old world, transmuted into what we have

chosen it to be, and glowing with the light of the Lamb.

The Christian engineer is the one who contributes to the eternal universe. How could what he does be insignificant? To make even a *shoe sole* for the eternal universe! An eternal shoe sole which will be the delight of God and all who see it for ever and all the endless ages!

And people say that for engineers to be “really Christian” they have to read at Mass, or join in a group discussing the Bishops’ latest Pastoral.

There is nothing wrong, I say again, with reading at Mass or discussing the latest Pastoral; but the engineer—or any Christian—must not be bamboozled into thinking that his Christian perfection lies in this direction and not in Christianizing what he is doing, which means shifting his attitude toward what he is doing and seeing it as it really is, “in the light of eternity,” as they used to say.

The Christian engineer’s attitude is different from that of many who discuss Pastorals, because they are the worriers, who must “remake” things and “correct the evils” in the world; they are the moral ones. The Christian knows that the Master is running the universe, and can devote himself wholeheartedly to his eternal shoe sole, leaving it to others who have talents and interest in that direction to combat abortion and clear the slums.

The Christian engineer’s attitude is not one of “remaking” the universe, exactly, but of *cooperating* with it: of *studying* it, first, to see what it can be and what it “wants” to be—where it tends to head itself—and of submitting to this internal purposiveness of the material he is dealing with and helping it achieve its potential as easily as it can, consistently with its own nature, the nature of the things around it, and its relation to our lives. Like the Creator, he lifts it beyond what it can do by itself, putting the stamp of his mind upon it; but like the Creator, who builds grace *upon* nature and does not force grace into nature, he lifts it beyond itself in the way in which and to the extent to which its own natural tendencies lean. The sole of the shoe he is making looks to the foot and how the foot adjusts itself to the

different directions the person walks and runs; and the sole will then suggest ways of being designed so that it can help keep the walker and runner in balance and the foot from slipping, no matter how the runner turns or leans. Instead of saying what the foot “ought” to do, he looks to what the running foot *wants* to do, and designs the sole so that it acts as if the person were barefoot, but his bare feet were protected. Isn’t that what a shoe is? A protection for the foot that *enables the foot to act* without damage from outside? It is not a prison for the foot. God designed the first sole, made out of skin—the Christian improves on God’s original, given the new conditions we use our feet in; and as Christian, he is, of course, God re-designing the foot’s covering. And when he is through, if he is successful, the people who wear his shoe will not even notice they have anything on their feet; but will simply be aware that motions they used to make are now easier and more comfortable.

The Christian engineer will also, because of his attitude, be able to look at *all* aspects of whatever it is he is working on and transforming, so see that they all function together. When IBM came out with its first Selectric typewriter that had the interchangeable ball-shaped typehead that moved across the page instead of moving the paper by the typing-point, part of its advertising was to show a picture of the typewriter, which had a low-cut, entirely new, curved shape, and say, “The beauty is just a bonus.” The beauty of an instrument we use, however, is part of its reality; the objects we use should speak to us of their function and how it can make our lives more pleasant and enjoyable. But this has to be designed into them: the old typewriters looked massive and awkward, as if it took strong fingers to make them do anything; the new ones speak of ease of operation—and of course, now check your spelling and grammar, and by the time you are reading this, God knows what they do: it may be that they just take dictation. But whatever they do, they should do it so that they cooperate with you in your actions, and they should look as if they want to cooperate with you, not that you can make them do things if

you're clever enough to cheat them into helping. It is this cooperativeness that is designed into them by the engineer.

I have had experience with many computer programs designed to help with tasks of writing and filing and so on; programs very efficient, once you could figure out how to use them. But the directions (the "documentation") was from the point of view of the programmer, and gave all sorts of details of how the program was constructed, and was very short on how you were to use it. The Christian engineer not only, then, looks to the material he is working on, and cooperates with its latent tendencies; he looks to the people who are going to use whatever it is he designs, and adopts their point of view, and shows them how they can make the best use of what he has provided for them. He does not leave them orphans.

Now of course, a given engineer might not have the talent to do all of these various tasks: make the material into an efficient tool, make the tool beautiful and speaking of its function in human existence, and making the instructions readable and to the point. To the extent that he is Christian, he recognizes his own limitations, and is willing to seek and submit to help in the areas where his competence is low. Why should he care if the project is "mine alone" or "ours"? He is not what is important: the eternal environment is what he is interested in.

The secret in Christian engineering, then, is in attitude and the way you see things, not what you do. Technologism will turn into true technology, not by "overcoming evil," but by submitting to the material universe and helping it; we will then discover that it will help us, and the fear of domination by machinery will yield to a world in which machinery—and who knows, even new living forms, new animals—will do for us the kinds of acts that are now so mechanical and demeaning, and leave us the time to pursue more human endeavors.

If this sounds utopian, it is, of course; it is the situation that will prevail in the New Jerusalem, and not before. In this life, there will always be failure and danger and struggle. But this should not let us

get lost in the attempt to correct the evils, so that we do not take the small steps toward the goal that can in the present age and under present conditions be taken.

The Christian artist

In the days of ancient Greece no distinction was made between the artist and the engineer; and based on what I said above, it could be questioned whether the gulf that separates them today is as great as it seems to be.

Still, they are different, and in some ways very different, and the Christian will recognize the difference. What the artist is trying to do is “make a statement,” which used to be called “making something which is beautiful,” except that our notion of beauty has been confused with “prettiness,” and in reaction to that, artists today seem obsessed with the unpleasant. I remember an artist colleague of mine showing some samples of drawings of a student when the student started studying under him, and then in her last year. The first drawings were rather realistic pictures of flowers; the last, rather realistic pictures of animals’ skulls. “See that?” he said. “Now that’s *strong*.”

What is beauty? To condense a book (Yes, I have a book on the subject, called *Aesthetics*) into a couple of sentences, what it amounts to is this: Our emotions vary depending on two things: the state our body is in at the moment (e.g. how hungry you are) and the environment that is being reported by our senses (the steak you see in front of you). Now *understanding*, is *being conscious of what the relationship is* among the data in our consciousness.

Ordinary understanding uses the *perceived characteristics* of things as what we see related: the steak is red, the steak used to be part of a steer, and so on. *Aesthetic understanding*, which is where we find beauty, is *relationships based on the emotional overtones of what we see*. The steak is seducing my eyes, the steak is longing for a home in me,

and so on. That is, when I look at the steak, the emotion I experience is similar to what I experience when confronted with a temptress.

Now this is *real understanding of a fact*, because the steak *does in fact* tend to awaken this emotion, and the emotion *is in fact* similar in some ways to the emotion of being seduced; and so something about the steak *is in fact* similar to what a seductress does. But this particular fact about the steak (as opposed to its redness, its thickness, and so on) can *only* be understood by using the emotions as the receiving instrument and not the perceptions.

Perhaps I can illustrate the difference between esthetic understanding and perceptive (ordinary) understanding by giving an example of a confusion of the two. St. Bernard (I think it was) in one of his sermons compared a community of monks to a set of teeth: teeth are white; monks are pure; teeth shine, monks' virtue shines; teeth are regular and the same; monks are regular and the same; teeth are hard on the outside, but sensitive on the inside; so are monks; teeth won't let anything come between them; neither will monks—and so on.

The trouble with this analogy is that, however apt the comparison may be on the *perceptive* level, *esthetically* it is so inept that it becomes ludicrous. That is, the *emotional overtone* connected with a community of monks and the emotional overtones encountered in contemplating a mouthful of teeth are *contradictory*, not complementary. And the sermon is funny, because Bernard is obviously so serious in pursuing the comparison and is blissfully unaware that on the esthetic level he is comparing two opposites as if they were the same.

In any case, the point is that there is factual truth (yes, hard, factual truth) to be got at by comparing our emotional overtones of things, because the things really cause us to react this way, and therefore, the similarities in effects will argue to *real* similarities in the causes, but similarities undiscoverable by "scientific" understanding, which uses the perceptions as the effects.

Hence, the artist has truths to teach us: truths not necessarily pleasant, but truths got at through emotions. Hence, what is beautiful is not necessarily pretty (i.e. pleasant); and what is beautiful is not just what awakens an emotion; what is beautiful is what is *meaningful emotionally*. I hasten to add that what is beautiful is what is *true* esthetically, and what is true *can* be pleasant as well as “strong.” Michelangelo’s *David*, for instance tells us, through the emotions we experience when we see it, something about facing odds (the frown on the forehead) and yet how God will help us overcome (the strength and grace of the body), something about what David is, what Florence is, what Greek art and the Italian Renaissance is (the rough peasant hands in what is an imitation, in a sense, of classic Greek sculpture), what the human body is, what you can do with a flawed block of marble, who Michelangelo is, and so on and so on. It is a treatise, not something that is “nice”; and the longer you look at it, the more nuances you notice is what it says, based on what it does to you emotionally.

Perhaps the first difference between the Christian artist and the non-Christian is that the Christian can avoid the aura of sacred seriousness that seems to pervade the art world. Once when Robert Shaw was about to direct the Cincinnati May Festival Chorus (of which I was a member) in a performance of Handel’s *Messiah*, he gave us our pre-performance pep-talk in language that made it clear that he was convinced that music and only music was going to save the world, and that we were to sing to the best of our ability because the whole future of mankind depended on what musicians did.

Such an attitude is, in a sense, understandable, because music, perhaps even more than some other art forms, engages the emotions powerfully, and yet since there are relationships to be discovered from these emotions, there is understanding of a mysterious kind of truth (about “life”) from it; and the combination of actually *knowing* something valid with a very strong emotional charge can be overwhelming, making you think that the veil of the world is ripped

away and you look into the face of God—and you can't stand it, and you break down in tears, though you wish it would never end. It *seems*, therefore, religious to an atheist (I hasten to add that I don't know whether Shaw is an atheist or not), or at least as a substitute for religion. For many, art is a substitute for religion, and religion is regarded as nothing but an art form: something that gives you an emotional uplift, like a great tragedy, but has no "factual" basis.

There are several fallacies here, of course, that the Christian, who knows what religion is, can sort out. First of all, religion is not in itself emotional. If it involves emotions, and truths to be learned through these emotions, then this is an *added* esthetic dimension to the religion, and is not the essence of the religion itself, any more than the scientific studies Theology makes into the text of Scripture and the relation of the statements of revelation to facts known elsewhere is the essence of religion. Religion is the relation we have with God; and Christianity is the taking over of God's point of view, which in itself is not emotional at all, and which as one progresses in Christianity, becomes less and less involved with the esthetic dimension and is characterized by "dryness," as they used to say.

Secondly, these facts understood from art (or from the esthetic dimension of religion, for that matter) are simply facts, no more significant than facts understood perceptively or scientifically; no *less* valid as facts, but no more "profound" or "meaningful." In fact, they are no less *abstract* than what is known by ordinary understanding, because they only deal with one aspect of the object: the aspect by which it is capable of affecting our emotional apparatus. Nevertheless, they *seem* terribly profound and "truer" than the cold facts of science, because they engage the emotions, which add a special punch to the experience as a whole. For this very reason, they are suspect as facts by scientists, because for the scientist (who is precisely not using his emotions as a basis for comparisons), any emotionality getting into his investigations interferes with his type of objectivity—which he, of course, takes as the only "real" type of objectivity.

In any case, the Christian artist, because of his faith, can put art into its proper place: as something valid and meaningful and true and factual, but as something that is valid and so on only in its own sphere, and does not replace either religion or science, but merely supplements what is known from them. There are definite truths to be known from what things can do to our emotional apparatus, truths which can be known only by carefully using our emotional apparatus as a receiving-instrument rather than a behavior-guide; and these truths are worth knowing; but they are not the “truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”

The Christian artist, then, is not necessarily the person who writes poems on religious subjects, or who makes music to sacred texts, or who adorns churches with paintings, sculpture, and architecture. If he writes a novel, for instance, he has, perhaps, something to say about what human beings are like, by depicting them acting before the reader in such a way that the reader becomes emotionally involved and “identifies” with them and experiences for himself the kinds of emotions they are feeling, and sees connections among these emotions and the lives he is watching, and says, “Yes, that is how people are; that is in me too.”

The difference here between the Christian and the atheist is that the Christian has a different *idea* of what life *looks like*, because he sees it in the light of his faith; and the existentialist *angst* that life is at bottom absurd and a frustration and chase after wind is for him a lie—and any of the characters who feel that way and act that way in his novel are mistaken—just as in existentialist novels, it is esthetically clear that the characters who think that life ultimately makes sense are the mistaken ones. The Christian as such cannot make a work of art whose point is that everything is pointless, which seems to be the point of *Waiting for Godot* or *The Stranger* or *The Trial*.

At bottom, even tragedy makes sense. That is the meaning of Aristotle’s “catharsis.” A life that ends horribly, such as that of Shakespeare’s Othello, is seen *to be inevitable* because of what went

before; it is the *esthetically logical* result of Othello's *understandable* fear that Desdemona couldn't really love him because he was Black, and therefore when Iago suggests that she is unfaithful, his tendency to paranoia convinces him that it is true, which leads to her death and his own death. The evil makes sense, which makes it no less horrible; but what the play says is that the world is not nonsense, and even the evil in it is not the irrationality it seems. That is why *Othello* is a great play, and why watching it, though devastating, is a valuable experience.

Of course, the Christian knows that *Othello* does not stop with the deaths of the characters, and that redemption and happiness are theirs insofar as they desire it: that the real unhappy ending is the eternal ending of the person who refuses to be happy, and who will not accept happiness because it means giving up his cherished misery. But this does not mean that the Christian is going to preach this in his plays and novels; it is just that this attitude is there, giving him a view of life that is essentially different and *truer* than the atheist's; and this view of life needs a hearing.

Interestingly, even when dealing with a religious subject, it does not follow that the Christian artist will treat it "religiously." Let me illustrate by a play I once wrote about the soldiers who crucified Jesus. The theme of the play was not, really, how the crucifixion effected the conversion of Longinus; but it was "If you had been there, you probably wouldn't have been converted." The Jewish soldier kept his faith in the Lord, and his rejection of Jesus as a deluded man who thought he was God; the devout pagan thought that Jupiter had won the battle of the gods against this Jewish god; the atheistic Roman had his atheism shaken up for a while, even by a vision of his brother, but after the earthquake was over, was convinced that it all had a natural explanation. Only Longinus, who actually nailed Jesus to the cross, changed his way of thinking. And I think that is the way life is: the light shines, but there are very few who open their eyes to it, or having opened them, do not close them again and deny that it was

really the light.

The point here is not the esthetic validity of the play; that is for those who see it to decide—if any ever do. The point is that a *Christian* play dealing with a “religious” theme is not a vehicle for propaganda; it is a means of saying something *true* through the emotional involvement in the characters. To make the characters all be converted would be false to what people really are like (and certainly false to what actually happened); and lies are lies, whatever their purpose.

There *are* esthetic falsehoods, just as there are scientific falsehoods, and the art that surrounds religion is full of false esthetic statements. It is hoped that the Christian artist, who is not interested in “promoting religion” or “converting souls” (both laudable goals, but not lay), but in seeing things as they are, with God’s eyes rather than “for God’s glory”, will spot the misunderstandings and false statements in the art that surrounds his religion and perhaps do something to replace it with something that is true.

What am I speaking of? Look at the statues that “adorn” our Catholic churches. Does this statue of Jesus with his knee slightly bent so the robe will fall, oh so gracefully, and his hand held out in the proper balletic attitude and the rosebud lips showing through the perfectly cut beard—does this show what Jesus is really like? Is our emotional reaction to this simpering effeminate the *meaning* of the way we are to regard the one from whom we would ask the mountains to cover us? Or poor Mary, looking up to the sky with that silly smile on her face, incapable of being bothered with us on earth because she’s so busy being filled with emotional transports at whatever she sees up there in the clouds—is *this* our mother and model? Is this what it means to be a saint? No wonder there are so few of them.

And listen to the music at Mass. We are about not merely to witness the Crucifixion, but as the Body of Christ living today, to *be crucified* now two thousand years ago, and we sing “Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God of Hosts!” It is the most awesome moment of all of

history, by the mysterious timelessness of the Infinite made present to us and us present to it and part of it—and the music we sing says esthetically, “Let’s get out the tambourines and dance.” And at Communion, one of the old hymns said, “O wondrous thing: a poor nobody, a slave, is eating his Master!” *O res mirabilis! Manducat Dominum pauper servus et humilis!* Mozart’s music reinforces the meaning. Today’s Communion hymns have very little to do with “breaking bread together on our knees,” as the Spiritual says, with this same awe; they are more concerned with how neat togetherness feels.

What Cardinal Ratzinger called “utility music” that involves catchy tunes that the people can pick up easily has its place in church services; but its place is not all over the place; and in some places, it is an esthetic falsehood, if not a downright lie.

I think it significant that Catholic congregations have for twenty years now—a whole generation—been forced to sing at Mass, and by and large have resisted all the urgings. Very few sing at all, and those who do either bellow or timidly whimper the notes. Why is this? First of all, I think that most parishioners feel that they *can't* sing, and why do something badly just because it “ought” to be done? Secondly, they find singing a *distraction* to what they are really here for: to participate in the crucifixion, not to be involved in a social get-together. They instinctively see the fallacy in being so involved in participating in the ceremony that you forget that the ceremony has as its purpose to get you involved in participating in the crucifixion. The pop music is not only irrelevant to this, it is often positively detrimental to it.

I think that the problem with religious art and religious music is not that the artists don’t have their hearts in the right place; their intentions are good; it’s that they don’t have their *minds* with the right focus; they don’t *see* accurately. They see their religion as it “ought” to be, not as it is; religious art is a depiction of what sanctity “should” be, not what sanctity is. The musicians make music for the purpose of allowing the people to participate (because the people

“ought” to participate, and therefore we have to encourage them by making tunes that will make them want to sing), not music that says what the place it is used in means.

Now it may very well be that a Christian artist has no particular ideas dealing with sanctity or the meaning of various parts of the Mass, or even with any religious topic at all. Fine. Let those who have something to say on those subjects say them. The Christian artist has something true to say on whatever subject he receives an idea about. Like the Christian scientist, he listens to reality (with his emotions, however, unlike the scientist), until reality speaks to him; and then with the best of his skill, he tells us what reality is like. This is certainly as valid a Christian function as producing art for use in religious contexts.

Once again, it is the attitude toward things that distinguishes the Christian from the non-Christian; and since this attitude is the universal, objective one of God Himself, then what the Christian says will be that much more likely to be true than his non-Christian counterpart.

The Christian entertainer

I cringe at how inadequate these treatments are, but assuage my conscience with the reflection that this is supposed to be a preface, not a treatise.

To say a couple of words about entertainment, it is connected with art in that the “passive” kind of entertainment is one in which we sit back and let something happen to us; and what happens is a sort of low-level esthetic experience, whereas “art” in quotes generally attempts to say something complex or profound. That is, television programs *do* say something esthetic; but esthetically they tend to be variations on “ $2 + 2 = 4$,” where what is said is nothing terribly taxing to the mind, and there is enough of a variation not to make it perfectly obvious that it is the same old thing. When it is exactly the

same esthetic statement week after week, it becomes boring and no longer entertaining. Esthetic sophisticates are apt to find it boring anyhow, because they see that the variations are not relevant, and are tired of hearing the same hackneyed ideas—when the ideas are not recognized as positively false.

Television is not, however, in its shallowness, something to be deplored. We don't always want, nor should we always be forced, to concentrate and study either scientifically or esthetically. We no more always ought to be reading books of the level of *The Critique of Pure Reason* than we ought to be subjected to esthetic fare of the level of *Hamlet*. There are times to relax and enjoy yourself. The entertainer is the one who supplies this need.

Let me examine briefly just two of the most popular forms of entertainment, humor and spectator sports, and show how both of them are actually ways in which we *understand* something, and learn facts about the world.

What humor is is basically a statement (whether esthetic or perceptive) that things are not as you would reasonably expect them to be: the world is absurd, and apparently contradictory.

Now there are three different attitudes you can take to being presented with a contradiction that seems to be taking place—let us say, you open a carton of milk, and pour out a glass of clear, tasteless liquid. You can rely, as the scientist does, on the assumption that there are no real contradictions, in which case you regard the situation as a problem to be solved, an effect for which you intend to discover the cause. With this attitude, you are interested in how the water got into the milk carton. Or you can take the “good/bad” attitude toward the unexpected water, and consider that the milk carton *ought* to be filled with milk, and be angry; or, finally, you can laugh.

The third attitude takes no “stand” on the issue, but simply *accepts the fact* that the world does not conform to our expectations of it; and it is this *fact* that the world is not reasonable according to our *a priori* idea of reason that is what is the essence of humor and what makes us

laugh. If we don't like it that the world is not reasonable, then we suffer, and we regard the situation as evil; if we are curious as to how to make sense out of it, we are investigators; if we accept it, we think it is funny. Humor does not try to do anything about the absurdity; it simply accepts it as a fact.

None of these attitudes is wrong, necessarily, though any of them can be perverted. The scientist who studies a starving child to find out how starvation affects the nervous system has let scientific curiosity get in the way of his obvious obligation not to let the child he is studying starve, whatever the scientific value of the knowledge that can be gained. The person obsessed with evils and the righting of wrongs is, as I have been at such pains to point out, often the person who ruins what is there in the attempt to get rid of the evil. And the "sick" humorist who is so detached that he can see that suffering is funny (the practical joker, for instance, who laughs at the ridiculous position you get into as you crack your spine on the floor when he pulls the chair out from under you) is a person whose humor says he is "above" us all, and can say with Puck, "What fools these mortals be."

But be that as it may, there are incongruities and absurdities that don't involve damage, or even damage that is significant enough for us to have to regard as deplorable rather than funny. And even horrible damage can be enjoyed as funny in certain contexts, as in the cartoons of the coyote and the road runner. The cartoon coyote is so unreal that we don't have to feel sympathy with him, and can laugh as he creates his ingenious ways of destroying the road runner, and these ways backfire in all sorts of unexpected directions, always involving him in total destruction—from which he walks away in the next frame unscathed. But as soon as we see this sort of thing done by a real animal, or even a cartoon human being, then we feel (rightly) uncomfortable when we laugh; we can't morally even enjoy the pain and torture of an animal, much less a fellow human being.

It is the task of the humorist to make us see the ways in which the world is not what we would expect it to be. He is therefore teaching

us when he makes us laugh. If the joke is old (some fact we already know), it is not funny; if it is not seen by us as true, it is not funny; if we can spot the incongruity too early so that it does not strike us, the joke is boring—and so on.

It think it can be seen that humor has a lot that is Christian about it. The world, created by God whose mind is beyond reason, is not reasonable; and from our point of view this transrationality of the Creator shows up all over the place. Consider the fact that we don't have many multifunction organs; the eyes see but don't do anything else, the ears just hear, and so on. But the organ we use for our highest physical function, the reproduction of another material spirit, is also the organ we use to get rid of our liquid garbage. That's the kind of God who made us.

The Christian is not so "moral" that he can't see how funny this is; since he adopts the Divine way of looking at things, from which nothing is either good or evil, then he is predisposed toward laughter rather than indignation when confronted with a world which does not conform to our idea of reasonableness. He can see humor in everything, from toenails to tiaras, from rutabagas to the Resurrection. The Resurrection funny? Jesus himself played a joke on Mary Magdalene by coming up behind her as she was weeping at the tomb and letting her think he was the gardener; and he played another on the students locked in their room by suddenly appearing there and saying, "Hello." We get all solemn about "Peace be to you," but that was the way you said "hello" in those days. Think of the look on their faces!

Now of course, the Christian humorist is human as well as divine, and though certain things are funny from a strictly divine point of view, they cannot be funny to a human. The Nazi holocaust has much that the Nazis must have laughed at about the incongruous ways the Jews died; but no one who has a spark of humanity about him would think this was funny. It is forbidden to be indifferent to such things. Similarly, one who knows what is going on in an abortion is not going

to enjoy abortion jokes, and so on. The Christian humorist will not be solemn, but he will not be immoral—because as Christian, he is human, and what is *anti*-human is not funny.

But what is the Christian sportsman—the baseball player, for instance—teaching? The value of teammanship? No, not really. Sports are interesting mainly to those who have tried playing the sport in question (which is one reason why soccer has not yet caught on in the United States as a spectator sport) and who know how terribly difficult it is to do what they see the sports professional doing.

What the spectator is looking for and enjoys, really, is seeing acts that he knows involve superhuman ability performed with apparent grace, ease, and enjoyment. He has held a bat and has swung at a curve and missed; and he sees Eric Davis make a blur of his bat as the ball comes smoking at him, and the ball disappears into the seats, as Davis gracefully lopes around the bases. And then he sees him in the outfield make a leap and a backhanded stab at an impossible fly, pull it down, and fire in to second to pick off the runner, all in one smooth motion. It is poetry.

And that, of course, is the point. The emotions involved in seeing the gracefulness, knowing that this grace means that the man's body is under the perfect command of his mind, teach the spectator what the mind can do to our despised flesh. Yes, sports teaches what the *mind* can do, cooperating with the body, because we know that it is not simply raw talent, but training, training, training, until the body is so much the tool of the mind that the whole secret of the game is mental, not physical.

Anyone who has done anything at all with sports knows this: the edge is the mind, not the body. Even in weight lifting, which I do, it is the same. It is the *attitude* you take toward the weight you are going to lift that is the main factor in whether you can lift it or not, and whether you can lift it well and gracefully, or whether you are awkward about it. Weight lifting is perhaps the most “physical” of all of the sports, yet even here it is mind over matter, really. All of us are

physically capable of lifting four or five times the weight we can lift even in the best conscious state—as can be seen in times of emergency, when a mother raises the end of a two-ton car that is on top of her son. How you can train the body so that you can call on its reserves and how you can make a body the instrument of apparently superhuman feats of strength, is what weight lifting as a sport is about.

Thus sports, especially spectator sports, speak about the human spirit and its cooperation with the body; they say that the spirit and the body are one, but the spirit rules; but it expresses itself in the body, and the result is human beauty. Spectator sports are an art form, and one of the few art forms that it isn't "sissy" to enjoy; that is what gives them their great appeal to men.

The Christian sportsman has nothing to be ashamed of when he appears on television apparently extending his childhood playing a silly game. He is teaching the world the marvels of the embodied spirit when the spirit is joyfully embodied, not at odds with the body which limits it. What could be more Christian than this?

The Christian advertiser and laborer

There are so many other fields that could be treated. What is a Christian mathematician? Not one who is "moral" or who uses problems like, "How many nuns would there be if each...", but one who knows what mathematics *is*, what it is doing, and who helps it be that way. What is a Christian accountant? Not one who doesn't use bookkeeping to cheat (not that the Christian *would* do this), but one who sees what the numbers are doing and helps the books be what they are, and the firm to do what it does with their help. What this would be in practice, I leave to others. Neither the Christian mathematician nor the Christian accountant would *do* anything very different from his non-Christian counterpart; but his different attitude toward what he is doing would make his own life more enjoyable and make the work itself glow with hope and love, somehow.

But let me close this list of jobs by saying something about Christian advertising, and Christian labor, because I think they are both misunderstood. Advertising, first of all, because it seems exactly the opposite of what Christianity as a kind of morality is supposed to be all about: it seems to be pandering to greed and selfishness, using falsehoods and downright lies to persuade those who are not greedy to become as greedy as possible. It is capitalism at its worst.

But what does advertising do, really? It tells people about what they can be like if they have the product or service that the advertiser is attempting to sell. Is it a lie to say that if you own a Mazda RX-7 sports car, you can zip around the country in comfort and with panache? Because you can. It is not simply movement from place to place, any more than a suit is just something to cover your body. It makes an esthetic statement about you and your mobility; and esthetically it says something about your *taste* in movement.

This is the truth, not a falsehood. The value of the car is what it can enable the person who has it to do that he otherwise couldn't do; its value is something beyond the metal and the machinery. There is nothing wrong with pointing this out to people who would be interested in buying a car: pointing out to them that when you buy a car, you are not simply concerned with what it can do, but what *you* can do with it, and so what you can *be* with it.

Granted, much of advertising is simple silliness, and much of it is pretty sordid: the pornography of acquisitiveness. But this is not to say that it has to be this way. Advertising does perform a legitimate function: it lets people know that goals they never thought of are open to them, and shows them how to get there. Is there any reason why this attitude could not pervade advertising, and we have to be bombarded with stupidities?

Once again, the Christian would be moral. I would find it difficult for myself as a Christian to advertise the how much better Kool cigarettes are than other brands, if smoking them is an invitation to lung cancer; there are certain accounts, I would suspect, that a

Christian would not take on. And there are certain things that a Christian would not do: mislead people into thinking that things are not what they are, and so on.

But this is not to say that things are always what they *seem*. Not too many are aware of the spiritual value of the material; and the Christian layman, who has some expertise in this area, can show this value to the public in a way that the non-Christian cannot; and the Christian would not be plagued by the vague uneasiness of the non-Christian who does the same thing, because the non-Christian thinks that there's something underhanded in what he's doing (portraying Pepsi as roistering innocent enjoyment, like splashing in a pool or surfing), while the Christian realizes that the metaphor is valid. Exaggerations are not lies; even Jesus used exaggerations, and wild ones ("If your eye is an obstacle to you, pluck it out and throw it away!"); and no one takes the exaggerations of advertising literally.

So yes, there is such a thing as Christian advertising; and like everything else Christian, it involves mainly shifting your focus on what you are doing, and the result is a redemption and transformation of what is fallen.

As to labor, so much has been said about the "dignity of labor" that something needs to be said to point out that labor's dignity has been emphasized precisely because in itself it is *not* dignified—and who knows this better than the laborer? The "dignity" of collecting garbage is such that if we could figure out a way for machines to do the whole job, we would be criminal to subject human beings to such a rotten task a minute longer than we had to. The "dignity" of wielding a jackhammer or lugging a hod of cement up a ramp is a farce. There is nothing human about such a task, in itself: nothing that speaks of the embodied spirit.

No, the "dignity of labor" is not in the labor, but in the laborer, who is willing to degrade himself to the level of a packhorse because the job has to be done and in the state of society we are in, some human being has to do it. In this way, a subhuman task becomes an

act of charity, and the person who freely undertakes it (when he could be doing something more fulfilling) is performing a noble sacrifice indeed. He has the dignity of the housewife, who gives up her fulfillment for the sake of the comfort and freedom of her husband and her children. In this sense, the feminists are right; a woman who is forced into this menial position is a slave. But a woman who does it because it must somehow be done and why should she not be the one is a heroine.

What the Christian attitude should let us do is to cut through pious platitudes and see things as they are. There is nothing *bad* about spending your life digging in the dirt, or changing diaper pails; but neither of these tasks are uplifting in themselves, but only in their effect on others. In an age of self-fulfillment, it is not surprising that nurses are in short supply. Who could pay anyone enough to make that kind of task *fulfilling*? In these cases, the “dignity” is not in what is done, but in the fact that there are people willing to submit to it, because someone has to do it.

And as technology advances, let us hope that it advances into these areas where human beings are acting like machines or worse and takes over the sub-human chores and leaves humans to do human things. Granted, there are some human beings who are not capable of doing any but mechanical tasks; but machinery can help them—and surely there is now such a vast number who “cannot” because they have been stifled by having to do nothing but this sort of thing.

I think that Karl Marx had in the back of his mind when he referred to the “classless society” a world in which machinery would be so advanced that only a few people had to tend it, and it would produce such an abundance of everything that no one would need to buy and sell and scrimp and scrape for the means of a bare existence. It is not inconceivable that machinery and automation could lead, if not to that happy condition where you could walk into the factory and just take your red Mazda RX-7 and drive it off, still somewhat in that direction. The fact that Marx equated this with a classless society and

his attempt to put it into practice has resulted in the unprecedented horrors of the Communist police-state should not blind the Christian to the fact that (a) much human labor now *is* degrading and exploitative, but (b) machinery can be used to make it less so, not more so. Communism is not the answer; and I am thoroughly convinced that that parody of Christianity called “Liberation Theology” is as far from the answer as you can get. A Christianity of acceptance of the world as it is and recognition of its potential, coupled with a willingness to *help* it take its hesitating steps toward what could be, and which does not push it as it toddles forward, is what will redeem our working lives. When you “right the wrongs” you sweep the room clear of the devils and leave it bare—and then in come, as Jesus said, seven devils worse than the original ones.

The Christian at play

When the Christian is not working, he is loafing or he is playing. And there is such a thing as Christian loafing and Christian playing.

First of all, the Christian is not a workaholic. His work may mainly define him as a layman, but it is not his whole definition. He is something in his own right, not simply what he “does.” And so even if he is doing nothing, just sitting there in the sun, not “improving his mind” or anything else except his tan and his risks of skin cancer, even this is a gift of God and something that God is infinitely satisfied with. God has not given us “a task” that we are to perform in his world; in fact, St. Augustine *should* have said, “You have made us for *ourselves*, O Lord, and we will find no rest until we rest in this.” Those who are so busy trying to “do God’s will” obviously have no time to rest and just be; and when they get to heaven, they probably will be pestering the saints and angels with, “But isn’t there something else that has to be done? What new project have we got that’s not finished yet?”

Relax; God is running the universe; and if he runs it through us, generally speaking, there are times when we can say, “All right,

Master, you take over for a while; I want to loaf.” The idea that you can’t is the notion that you’re in control, which is the serpent’s tail of good and evil sprouting out of your mind again. A certain amount of laziness lets yourself know that God is in charge, and this is even necessary for Christian health.

(As I write this, my *daimon* tells me it’s true—and I think I read it in Chesterton somewhere—and it makes me realize what a sinner I am. Oh, well. In God’s good time; if I’m driven now, this just means another miracle to make me relax when finally I get over on the other side.)

With respect to play, I think that the Christian finds his work his main form of play. What is play? First of all, it is not serious, which means that it is purposeless. Play is different from work in that work has a purpose, and play is activity done for its own sake. Play has an ostensible purpose, to make the playing challenging: you have to get the ball in the hoop under difficult conditions; you have to hit the ball and run around the bases and back to where you started before they can catch you; you have to fill in the spaces with letters; and so on. But the purpose of the game is not the purpose; the purpose makes the playing interesting, as I said much earlier when I mentioned that life is fun, not “serious.” The playing of the game when it *is* play (and not something like professional sports), is for the sake of the play, not “to win” or “to see how high a score I can get,” though these, of course, are what makes the game interesting, and not to play “to win” means that you won’t do your best.

Now why is the Christian’s work his main form of play? Because, he has probably chosen as his work and as his service to others something that he finds enjoyable in its own right; and even if he hasn’t done so *a priori*, he looks on what he is doing as something interesting just in itself, and not solely for its purpose, whatever that is. And thus it is play as well as work and service. The purpose is there, but from one point of view, it just makes the game interesting. For instance, writing and teaching is my work; and even writing this,

which is my work but not my job that I get paid for; and as my work it has a terribly serious purpose: it is vitally important to me that you who are reading this should be as numerous as the sands of the sea, and that your lives should be changed and made fun by what you are reading. But I don't even know who you are as I write this—though undoubtedly I do now as you read it; how does it feel to know that the author is looking over your shoulder and saying, "Read some more; it gets even better in the next chapter!"?—and if my view of life is wrong, of course, you don't exist, and neither do I; but I can't believe that.

In any case, from another point of view, imagining you out there is the purpose that makes me sit down at this keyboard again and pound out this stuff which no one may ever read—and no one is likely to read while I am in this world; and pick it up after leaving it for months and resume the thread after rereading up to where I'd left off and saying, "Damn it, it's decent after all; it's got to be finished." In one sense, it's like finally throwing up after a day of an upset stomach: hardly what you'd call fun. But in another, there's the vomit that turns out—I hope—to be ambergris.

The whole thing is a game; it is the writing that is what it's all about, from my point of view. I write to an audience because I can't write not to an audience; but I am a writer, and writing is my act. It's—God help us!—my fun, my play. My wife twits me sometimes when I'm at my books with, "Well, why act as if you're in such agony? You enjoy it, don't you, or why are you doing it?" Ask the long-distance runner after the fifteenth mile if he's enjoying himself, and why he's doing it if he doesn't. Ask the golfer who's just about to break his five-iron why he's out there if he's not enjoying himself. Ask the chorus member after the third hour of practicing Handel's roulades why he's doing it if he's not enjoying himself. It's agony, that's what it is.

But it's worth it.

Why? Because it is. Because it is existence. Because it is.

There is no *reason* why it's worth it. It is worth it because we decide that it's worth it; it is itself reality. It is the agony we define as "fun."

And this, of course, is why the Christian's work is his play; it is his reality, and it exists in its own right. It is his suffering, and his suffering is his joy—not because he grits his teeth and bears it, but because it is. Because it is existence. Because it is. It doesn't *have* to have a purpose, even when it has one; it doesn't *have* to succeed (though it will hereafter, if not here); it simply is. That is the Divine attitude. For the Christian everything is play.

Which does not mean that the Christian doesn't do things that are *simply* play. He listens to music. He plays bridge. He bowls. He does crossword puzzles. He knits. And when he does, he doesn't take what he is doing too seriously, because he doesn't take anything seriously. It really doesn't matter if his partner goofed and he lost the rubber, or even if he himself goofed and he lost the rubber. In the eternal scheme of things, what importance does it have? In the eternal scheme of things, what importance does anything have?

Eat, drink, and be merry; for tomorrow you live forever.

Chapter 7

The Layman in Society

A great deal has been written, and more seems to be written as time goes on, about the social function of the Church, and by implication the social duties of Christians, until the impression is given that what Christianity is all about is social justice, which amounts to some kind of social work—or even a Marxist-Leninist “struggle” for the overthrow of the oppressor, a la Liberation Theology. I imagine that if you are still with me, you have the same misgivings I have about this interpretation of Christianity, and are with me in the old-fashioned notion that Christianity is about saving your soul, and heaven and other-worldliness and all the rest of it.

Nevertheless, we do exist in society, and civil society is about justice, and justice involves rights; and so as human beings we cannot be indifferent to rights and their violations; and so social justice is by no means alien to the Christian, because we must look on the world, not only with God’s eyes, but with the eyes of Jesus, who is human as well as Divine.

The phenomenology of society

So our first task, as Christian laymen, is to look at what it is to be in a society, and what society—any society—is.

What is the experiential difference between being on a bus going from Cincinnati to Cleveland, where everyone has the goal of getting to Cleveland, and being in a car pool going from home to work,

where everyone has the goal of getting to work on time? The first is not a “getting to Cleveland society,” but the second is a “getting to work society.”

What makes the difference is that *each* of the people in the first case has *the same* goal as the others (and so, in a sense, they have a “common goal,” which is what I was taught was what made a society a society); but they don’t have the goal *as* together, in the sense that they are not doing anything *to or for each other* to achieve the goal. They are “in league” with the bus driver, in a sense; but really he is serving each, and there is not really a society there either.

But in the car pool, John drives everyone on Monday, Frank on Tuesday, Henry on Wednesday, and so on; and on the day you don’t drive, you get picked up and driven. The difference here is *cooperation*; that is, co-operation. Each one is doing something *at some time* that benefits *the others* more than it benefits himself; and this time and the conditions under which he does his task is chosen by the *group*, *irrespective of the benefit to the individual*.

That is, John is assigned to drive on Monday. This means that the other four people expect not to have to drive on Monday, and not only that, they expect John to be the one who is going to use his car and come around to pick them up, and that John will be there, in Frank’s case a half hour before work, and in Henry’s case, twenty minutes before work, and so on, and Frank and Henry are expected to be there, ready to meet him when they hear his horn.

On Monday, this is all very convenient for Frank and Henry and the others, but it is a nuisance for John; he could do much better for himself on Mondays if he just drove to work and forgot the others—except that he realizes that if he does this, then he can expect an irate phone call from Louis, who organized the pool; and if he does it more than once, he can forget about anyone picking him up on the other days of the week; he’s out of the pool.

Therefore, the point of cooperation, which is what makes a society a society, is *that at some time, a person does for the group some act that*

is generally not beneficial for him—or at least an act whose benefit to him is irrelevant. That is, if John happens to like driving on Mondays, so that for some reason he'd rather drive than be picked up and driven, that's fine, but not the point (though it may be a reason why John was assigned on Mondays); the point is that whether he likes it or not, whether he gains by it or not, he is the one who is to drive on Mondays—or else.

This is rather interesting, when you consider it. An act *deliberately* done for the good of others, or an act for which one's own benefit is not the motive, is an act of *love*. And so it sounds as if the basis of society is love.

And it is, in a sense; but only in a sense.

The problem is that, though John might *in general* be willing to drive others on Mondays, things occur that may very well make him feel less generous on a given Monday; and so if we rely on his generosity, we may be able to count *sometimes* (and even pretty often) on being picked up on Mondays; but we can't really rely on it. But a car pool is worthless if you have to be worried whether John is going to be generous this week, or if you have to get the car out yourself and then be late. It would be worse than having no pool at all.

Hence, something has to be done to *guarantee*, or at least make likely, that John is going to do what we expect him to do, whether he feels like it or not. But since the *act* does not benefit him, there's nothing in *what he is doing* that could serve as a guarantee; the act, in itself, is an act of love; and love, being non-rational (because not self-advantageous), cannot be counted on to occur *systematically*.

So what a society requires is acts which are *objectively* generous (i.e. don't *in fact* benefit the doer), and are to occur *systematically*. This is what the sociologists call "patterned behavior." But generous acts by their very nature are not systematic. What to do?

Obviously, you have to *provide motivation* for the act; that is, you have to *attach* a threat of punishment (punishment, because rewarding the desired acts gets you into the economic realm, and is not

cooperation but service—and is a whole other story) to the non-performance of the act (“You do that again, and you’re out!”—meaning deprived of the advantages of being driven four days out of the five), so that if generosity and love fail, the act will be advantageous to the one who does it.

Thus, though the act in itself is an act of love, it need not be done *out* of love, and we can’t expect people to be acting out of love all the time, because love is transrational, and therefore unsystematic and sporadic. So the objectively generous act expected by society can actually be done for any or all of *three* reasons: (a) because it benefits the others in the society (in which case it is a true act of love); (b) because instead (or also) there is the long-term advantage of being in the organization, whatever it is, which either replaces the other-directedness of the motivation with this self-centered motive, or at least adds it; and/or (c) because if you don’t do the act, something bad will be done to you as punishment—which, of course, is also self-centered.

Let me point out that there is nothing *wrong* with self-centered motivations; self-fulfillment and avoidance of self-harm is *morally good*, and in fact *defines* moral goodness. We have got so used to thinking of Christianity as a “super-morality” that we tend to think that *only* love is a “worthy” motive, and everything else is bad. Love is *Christian*, when it is a certain kind of love; love is *morally good* (in the sense of not morally wrong) when it does not choose harm to the self for the benefit of others; but it does not follow that love *defines* moral goodness. When we are most divine, we are beyond being human; and morality means doing what is human.

But with that said, it is instructive to notice that the *actions* which are involved in interpersonal relationships (if you ignore the motives why a person would do them) are in themselves other-directed, not self-fulfilling. And the two types of interpersonal relationships, the economic and the social, are really defined by the two types of motivations attached to the acts to make them not *solely* generous and

other-directed, but to make it *rational* for a person to do them. The economic relationship, as we saw, is defined by compensation, that is, reward for doing the act desired; the social relation, we now see, is defined by a threat (called a *sanction*) connected with *not* doing the act which is expected.

It is not surprising that the extremes of the libertarian theorists are anarchists. They think that society and its threats takes away freedom (which it does, as we will see), and that the economic relationship leaves you free; and therefore, they think that *civil* society (“government”), which you can’t avoid belonging to, is evil and also unnecessary, because any motivation you want to give to people can occur on the economic level, and the people will still do what is expected, but freely.

In critiquing this, let me first note that the basic premise that reward leaves you freer with respect to the act in question than a threat is in one sense true. When you refuse to do something for which you are offered a reward, then you are no worse off than you are now; whereas if you refuse to do an act which has a punishment attached to the refusal, you are going to be worse off. Further, rewards allow you to pursue *freely chosen* goals, which you can adopt or give up as you choose; punishments imply *damage to your present condition*, which gets you into the realm of choosing harm to yourself, which we are morally forbidden to do. Thus, you are freer to do an act and accept the reward or not do it and forego the reward than you are to do an act and avoid harm or not do it and incur harm.

Nevertheless, it is not all that simple. Generally speaking, when an act is rewarded, *that act and no other* is what will be done; there is no reason for doing anything but that act. On the other hand, when something has a punishment attached to it, then *you can do anything you please except that act*. Thus, punishing a given undesirable act leaves the whole range of human activity open to the person, whereas rewarding a given desirable act tends to restrict the subjects’ behavior to that act alone. In *this* sense, punishment leaves you freer than

rewards.

Now of course, in something as simple as a car pool, this makes little difference, because it is *doing* the act of driving on Monday which is expected, and therefore *not doing* it is the “undesirable” act; hence the threat actually threatens doing *anything else but* the act, and in practice motivates doing just this act, in the way rewarding the act would. But it makes the “reward” stronger, in the sense that doing it is a way of avoiding harm, not just getting something you want. But when society becomes complex, involving many people doing all sorts of things—especially in civil society—then the society doesn’t care so much what you *do*, so long as you *avoid* doing things which prevent others from doing things. Hence, in complex societies, the threats are more apt to allow freedom than restrict it. We will see more of this later.

As to the problem with anarchism, leaving everything up to the economic type of motivation of reward, we saw in the chapter on money that, given that people have necessities as well as values, the “reward” of compensation is not always something that *can* be accepted or rejected without damage; very often, if you don’t work for a salary, you die of starvation; and so you are *just* as “unfree” as you are when you are explicitly threatened with punishment; the punishment in this case has the *disguise* of a reward withheld; but when a reward is a necessity, not a value, it is not really a reward.

So the economic relationship can be threatening, even though it does not look threatening. That’s one thing. The other difficulty with anarchism is that the assumption is that people will respect each others’ rights; but it doesn’t follow that people for whom there is considerable advantage in not doing so will be motivated to do so (because they are, by and large, already the economically powerful) by economic factors; and secondly, given the different evidence people have, it does not follow that people will even *know* they are violating someone else’s rights, because they won’t be aware that the person *has* these rights. We Whites kept Black slaves for centuries, because we

didn't think they had the right to be free.

Hence, if there is going to be a respect for people's rights and a lack of exploitation of some by others, then *there has to be cooperation to ensure that everyone's rights are respected*. That is, there *has to be a society whose precise function it is to see to it that one person's "freedom" doesn't trample on others' rights*.

And this society *is* by definition civil society. So anarchy is self-contradictory. You *can't* get rid of "government" (the sanctioning power of civil society—its ability to threaten—its *authority*) and rely solely on economic motivation.

And by the same token, the "hippie" ideal of "let's get together and love each other," which led to the communes of the 'sixties, doesn't work. Why? Because love—true love—is not systematic, and systematic things, like cleaning up and taking out the garbage, have to get done. What happened in the communes was that the more generous among the group got tired of seeing the place in a mess and did the chores, while the rest of the people "loved" and loafed; and finally, the generous ones got tired of being used all the time and left, and the others wallowed in filth for a while until they found it wasn't worth it—and the commune disbanded.

No, we are loving creatures, but we are also rational creatures; and our rationality has to be taken into account. We are, of course, also fallen; and thus to count on love is doubly absurd, because there are those who will take advantage of the generosity of others and exploit it to their own benefit and others' harm. Society exists in part to see that this is not done.

The common good

Let me now mention a difference between my view of society and that of previous philosophers; it deals with the concept of "the common good."

In Christian philosophy and Theology, the teaching, as I have so

often pointed out, has been that God has a “purpose” for each of us, a role that each of us is to play in his plan, which implies that there is some definite set of actions that is “what is really and truly good for us,” and is what God sees (and therefore what is) our objective greatest good. This, of course, I see as the serpent masquerading as the spokesman for God—as I have also pointed out so often.

Now this notion that there *is* an act (or is a set of acts) which is objectively what my goodness consists in doing was around in ancient times, and it led philosophers like Plato and Aristotle to say that the function of society was to *legislate* these acts (in a small way in lesser societies, and in general in the society called civil society). Thus, the “common good” or “common welfare” of the members was one of the objects of society, in addition to the specific object (the common *goal*) for which the society was set up. The idea was that the legislation of society should look to how the members would be better off, and should legislate in such a way that the greatest number received the greatest objective benefit—of course, consistently with not doing any member damage. This ancient notion of the function of society carried through medieval times, right up to the time of John Locke, when the self-determination of the individual began to be stressed, and the seeds were sown that showed its inadequacy as a concept.

In the old days, it was assumed that the ruler of the society was like a wise father, and the members were like children, who did not know (as well as the father did) what was good for them. His job, then, was to guide them benignly to their objective happiness, and force them (always benignly) by legislation and therefore threats of punishment to do what was objectively good for them and would make them happy if they did it. Since they didn’t realize what really would make them happy, they would go astray like sheep unless the wise father shepherded them.

But if you take my view, that goodness is at base *subjective*, because it rests on a self-created ideal which may or may not have anything to do with the way things are, and is necessarily (as a goal) always

different from the way things are to some extent, then—I cannot stress it too much, because we have been so brainwashed—*there is no meaning to what is “really” good for us* and a “wise father” knows *exactly* no more about this subject than anyone else. The difference between a father and a *child* is that the child does not realize all of the effects of his acts, or that effects can’t be prevented once the act is performed simply by not wanting them; the difference is *not* that the father has a more objective idea of what is *good* than the child.

Therefore, once you get a person into a situation where he can see the results of his actions and recognize their inevitability, then if he is doing something that *to you* seems a waste of his life, who are you to say that your notion of what is good is “better” than his?

I interject once again that right and wrong are not the same as good and bad; actions that are inconsistent with the agent are objectively so; actions that pretend that things aren’t what they are are an objective pretense. But if a person sets up as a goal lifting weights and he has enormous musical talent, my contention is that it is not “objectively better” for him to study music and become an opera singer than to work on cars and go down to the gym three times a week and lift. If, on the other hand, a woman chooses to have an abortion because she doesn’t want to be a mother, she’s too late: she only becomes the mother of a murdered child; and if she knows that this is what abortion is, it doesn’t matter what she pretends; she condemns herself to eternal frustration (from which she can be redeemed, of course).

In any case, the point here is that in my view there is no objective good that the “fatherly” ruler has any business imposing on us; and so the notion of the “common good” as traditionally understood has no place in a just society. If it is “good” for us to wear seat belts, then perhaps legislation could make them available to those who want to use them; but *unless you can show some damage to anyone but the non-wearer, then the society has no business threatening punishment on anyone who doesn’t wear them*. This would be one case of the

“common good” as traditionally understood; if everybody wore seat belts, fewer of us would die in auto crashes, and that’s good. But is it *better* objectively than if we don’t wear seat belts and have millions of driver-and-passenger miles with the comfort of being able to move around in your seat?

You see, there is no calculus by which you can compare the amount of “objective benefit” in 500 fewer deaths as opposed to the 250,000 miles of driving chafed and hampered by a seat belt which will bring it about. “Well, if it saves even one life, it’s worth it.” Is it? Is not dying the greatest of all goods? For you, perhaps. But what about others? The martyrs, after all, considered keeping their faith worth dying for. Ah, but they were looking at eternity. Well, shouldn’t we all? Always? This life is *not* the only life; and so dying is *not* necessarily the worst thing that can happen.

Then how do you compare things like this? In the individual, there is no problem. You look at dying or being maimed, and you compare this with the discomfort. Depending on the likelihood you see in your being killed, and the discomfort in wearing the seat belt, you make up your mind. I personally always wear a seat belt, and I’ve got so in the habit of it that I feel uncomfortable without one in a car. But that is beside the point. The point is that the “goodness” and “badness” calculus depends on *your notion of what you are, which depends on your choice*, and is not something that applies to anyone but you.

All this by way of saying that I think that there must be a different interpretation of the “common good.”

In my system, *the common good of a society is the rights that the individual members have not given up in joining the society.*

That is, the “common good” is essentially a *negative* concept which is to guide legislation; and it guides it in this way:

1. *The society may never legislate any action which violates any right of any member of the society, however “beneficial” that action may be to however many other members of the society. If a member has a right, even an alienable right (one he can give up if he wants) which*

has not been given up as a condition of membership, then he cannot be forced by the society's laws to do anything that violates that right.

For example, government may tax people to see to it that those whose ownership of more than they need does not deprive others of necessities. But as soon as government taxes the rich *more than enough* to provide for the *bare necessities* for the poor, it is "doing good" and the rich then are *forced* to give to the poor more than what is necessary; so doing more than is necessary becomes necessary—which is a clear contradiction.

2. When society demands generous behavior of its members (as it does), then it must follow what I call the "Principle of the Least Social Harm," that is *it must choose the course of action that demands the least from the fewest number of people* consistent with getting the job done. Otherwise, people again are threatened with harm if they don't do more than what has to be done by them.

This means that the "common good" in the sense of "the greatest benefit to the greatest number" is *exactly the opposite* of what society is supposed to be promoting; and is the opposite of what I mean by the "common good." There is no *common* good; there is only the individual "goods" of the individual members of the society, and each of these are at base subjective, and a thousand subjectivities do not an ounce of objectivity make, nor do a thousand discrete individualities an ounce of "commonness" make—any more than the fifty individual goals of getting to Cleveland make the passengers on the bus have a *common* goal of getting there.

It follows from this that the *paternalistic theory of government is wrong* and is in fact *degrading* to the members of society, all of whom are adults, and each of whom is the only expert in what is "really good" for him. The only notion of the "common good" that makes sense, once we have asserted the subjectivity of goodness, is non-violation of rights.

Social justice

It should be fairly clear that the notion of “social justice” which follows from what I have said is not all that simple to come by. Soaking the rich to do good to the poor is *unjust* socially, even if the poor might be benefitted a great deal and the rich might barely miss what you take from them. If the rich have a *right* to the money, you are using a morally wrong means for what you consider a “good” purpose, and you are letting your notion of what is “good” override the objective considerations of right and wrong.

But society is a *cooperative* interrelation of human beings, and cooperation demands of its nature activity which is not beneficial to the one acting; and therefore, it might be possible to do at least *some* soaking of the rich and not be inconsistent with yourself (i.e. be immoral).

First, let me discuss whether this cooperative relationship is necessary for human beings to be human. If we are simply independent, self-determining individuals, who *can* freely *decide* to get into such an inter-dependent relation, but *need not of our nature*, then to force people to cooperate when they don't want to get into a cooperative relation (e.g. to force unwilling citizens to belong to civil society and then force them to pay taxes) would be a violation of human self-determination and morally wrong.

But in point of fact, no one of us can survive unless we receive *uncompensated* service from others. First of all, children cannot compensate their parents for what the parents do; and children will starve unless their parents (or someone in their place) feeds, clothes, educates, and shelters them. Hence, the economic relationship of “independent” individuals who cooperate by mutual *quid-pro-quo* compensation is only part of what it takes to be human; if we don't have the cooperative, *interdependent* relationship also, we can't live as human beings. Further, as I mentioned, since not everyone recognizes or respects all rights of all others, then unless people cooperate to ensure the respect of all rights of all people, the “independent, self-determining” self cannot in practice determine

himself without interference which he cannot in practice defend himself against.

Therefore, we cannot be human unless we relate to others in *both* the interdependent, cooperative way (expecting behavior under threat of harm) and the “independent” self-determining way (respecting rights and compensating activities). Neither of these types of relationship can be reduced to the other; though historically, there have been attempts to “derive” one from the other.

Since the family in olden times was regarded as the most “natural” way to relate to others, and since you are “thrown,” as Heidegger would say, into the family, where you must cooperate or else, then it is not surprising to find that in times past (and even in most of the world in time present), the cooperative relationship is looked on as the “really natural” one, and rights, if they are recognized at all, are conceived of as coming *from and through* the society—which culminated in the Divine Right of Kings and Thomas Hobbes’s theory that the king granted and could take away all rights.

And this led to Locke, who saw (correctly) that we “own” ourselves, as it were, and were not possessions of the King; that we had inalienable rights that were not given by any society and could not be taken away by any society, but simply must be recognized by every society. We, who live in a society which exists precisely on this principle, find it the “more natural” relationship to consider ourselves as self-determining, and to conceive of society as simply a kind of agreement we make together to assure each other that others will respect our rights and we will respect others’—and to make economic transactions possible.

But both of these are wrong. The economic relationship is not derived from the social relationship; nor is the social relationship derived from the economic: we are both self-determining *and* interdependent; and the one aspect of ourselves gives us rights and economic transactions, and the other the relation of cooperation, laws, and threats of punishment.

Let me now define *civil society* as *the society whose common goal is the common good*. That is, it is the society whose sole purpose it is to see to it *that no one's rights are violated*. We must, as I said, cooperate to see to it that this is done; and the society which does this is civil society—and its *authority*, its apparatus for deciding what actions must be done by members to ensure this purpose, what punishments are necessary to motivate the appropriate actions, and what is to be done to see to it that violators receive the punishment (the legislative, executive, and judicial functions), is called *government*. Government passes laws, sees to it they are carried out, and imposes sanctions when they are not.

It follows that government can *force* (by threats) people to do things when others' rights would be violated if the actions in question weren't done—and this forcing *does not* take away any *right* of the ones forced; the reason being that you never have a right to do anything which violates anyone else's right, and if you didn't do the act society is forcing on you, you would wittingly or not be violating somebody's right. Hence, it is *not unjust* to take away your *freedom* in this case, and force you to do something—even if you didn't *ask* to get into civil society.

Why this last? Because without civil society, *you* couldn't exist as human; your rights would be being violated, because there would be no cooperation to ensure that people wouldn't be stealing from you, no defining of money so that you could engage in economic transactions, and so on and so on. No one is “self-made.” So you have the benefits of society, if you are “self-made”; and so even if you didn't ask to be in it, you still have to cooperate in seeing that no one's rights are violated.

Therefore, we have to state *two* concepts of justice: (1) *commutative* justice, which is the justice of compensation, where you give up something to me if you expect me to do something for you, where we live up to contracts and agreements, and so on. This is “justice” in the sense of the *consistency of the relationship between*

self-determining individuals, wherein rights are respected and compensation is agreed on for services rendered. It is not exactly between “equals,” because rights are based on *personhood*, not equality.

But (2) there is also *distributive* justice in which those who are capable (with the least inconvenience) of seeing to it that no one’s rights are violated are expected to do actions which are *not* compensated, but which protect the rights of others. In distributive justice *more is expected from those who receive least from the society, and more is given to those who do least for the society.*

More is expected of those who receive least, because those who are most able to do most for others are the ones who have achieved their goals and have more than enough; and these people (a) need very little from civil society other than stability and protection, and (b) because they don’t have to be struggling to achieve their goals, are hurt least by giving something of what they have or their time to others. They shouldn’t have things given to them in compensation for their time, because this would be to take from *others* to compensate them, and others (by the supposition) less able to give it; their “compensation” is the fact that they live in a just society. More is given to those who do least, precisely because those who *need* help are those whose rights are being violated, which means that they are living at a less-than-human level; and therefore, they have no resources or time to give to others. For those of us to whom “justice” means “giving to each person what he has a right to have” and “equality” and “fairness,” (i.e. those who know justice *only* as commutative justice) distributive justice sounds unjust. People are not, in distributive justice, being treated “fairly,” in the sense of “equally,” because some people are expected to do something with no compensation for their time and talent—whether they like it or not, and under threat of punishment if they don’t do it—and others simply get things handed to them without doing anything to earn them. That’s “charity,” not justice, isn’t it?

Remember, I said that any society was based on love; and so there is a kind of charitable element here. But this is true *justice*. *Justice is the virtue by which people act consistently with the people involved in the action.*

In the case of the society whose precise function it is to see to it that no one's rights are violated—that no one is positively harmed in his humanity—then if everyone ignores, say, a child who has no parents, the child will starve to death. This ignoring amounts to a conspiracy of inaction (in practice, whether the conspiracy is intentional or not) which deprives the child of what he needs to live; and so it is, in effect, a conspiracy to kill the child. This must be prevented; and therefore, the *people as a whole* have to see to it that the child is fed. This means in practice that someone has to be delegated to do this. But there may be no one who has any relation to this child. Who will be delegated? Obviously, the one who can with the least inconvenience feed and care for the child.

The child then receives what he has a right to receive, and the person who is delegated is not being treated unjustly, because any society involves cooperative activity, and it is simply asking this particular cooperative activity of this person here and now. It isn't "fair" or "equal," but the child is not the equal of the adult; but this "equality" has nothing to do with whether the child has rights *against* other human beings.

But, as I said, in making these demands, distributive justice is violated if (a) the action demanded does more than simply prevent a violation of rights (more is done than has to be), or (b) the action demanded violates some right of the person who is required to do it.

Hence, social justice involves at least three things: (1) an objective assessment of whose rights are being violated (or menaced), (2) discovery of what actions are in practice possible to correct the violation, and (3) an evaluation of who is capable of performing those actions with the least inconvenience and with no violation of any other right of anyone.

One thing social justice is emphatically *not*; it is not “compassionate.” The “compassionate” person who “empathizes” with the plight of the poor and who has no sympathy with the “fat cats” who have more than enough to be happy is the person who will (a) do more than needs doing for the poor, which creates economic incentives to be poor and have things done for you—which violates the self-determination of the *poor*, and therefore is *unjust to them*; and (b) will take from the rich more than is necessary and impose unnecessary restrictions on them, violating their rights (which he has no sympathy for), and will motivate them to take themselves and their riches elsewhere, or use their riches in silly tax shelters instead of productively, which is what will really help the poor. Yes, “trickle down” is the best way to help the poor, as has been demonstrated historically for at least a hundred years.

A major part of the problem here is the false notion that rights are based on “equality,” and when people are unequal, the ones in the inferior position have their rights violated. But we are *not* equal; we have different abilities, intelligence, and physical strength given us by God; it is impossible for human beings to be all equal, because then there would only be one human being. And our different endowments give us by nature different and *unequal opportunities*; one very gifted person has *by nature* a better chance of getting ahead than an ugly, stupid, weak person. There is no violation of any right here, as the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard shows; if you are given what fits *your* nature, how are you *harmed* if someone else is given more—unless your natures are “equal” somehow? But they aren’t; there is no empirical and no theoretical evidence to support this secular dogma; all the evidence points in the other direction.

Rights are based on *the fact that we are self-determining, and in the act of self-determination can interfere with others’ self-determination*, whether they are our “equals” or not. So if I, in developing myself, have to maim a child (who is not my “equal,”) then I have acted inconsistently with myself as self-determining (since I want no person,

bigger, stronger, more talented, even an angel, to interfere with me).

The point is that *unequal treatment is not a violation of rights*; and the second point is that *distributive justice is necessarily unequal treatment*, from which follows the third point, that *equal treatment, systematically applied, is a violation of distributive (and therefore social) justice*.

Let me give one example. One of the current arguments against the death penalty is that it is “discriminatory”: more Blacks and lower-class citizens are executed than Whites or middle class people for comparable crimes. Here, we are in a division of social justice called *retributive justice*, which suits the punishment to the nature of the one punished.

Retributive justice demands that *no more be done in punishing an offense than is the minimum required to make it not advantageous to commit the offense*. That is, the threat of punishment is supposed to motivate obedience to the law. If the punishment threatened is so light as to make it more to your advantage to violate the law and pay the penalty, it does not do its job—as, for instance, fining a prostitute \$20.00 for engaging in prostitution, when she charges \$50.00 for the act; even if she gets caught, she makes \$30.00 for what she did.

But if the punishment is more than merely what is *necessary* to motivate behavior, then *gratuitous harm* is done to the violator when the punishment is being carried out, and so the government cannot say, “All we were trying to do was to see to it that the law stays in force.” That is, not to punish violators is in effect to say to everyone, “We don’t care if you violate this law; nothing is going to be done,” which removes the sanction as a threat, and the law as a law vanishes. To keep the law in force, violators must be punished; but their harm cannot be willed; the purpose of the punishment must be *solely* that this has to be done in order not to *encourage* violations.

I have argued this elsewhere (See, for example, my *Human Conduct*), where I have also made out a case that the death penalty can be the minimum required to discourage certain acts like terrorism.

I do not want to enter into a long exposition of that here. My point is that *the judge in passing sentence must impose a penalty which is the minimum which in this case will ensure the "sanctity of the law," whether this is the same punishment as someone else gets or not.*

For instance, for a middle-class White person, the disgrace and discomfort of mere imprisonment is enough to make it unreasonable for him to abandon his comfortable life by violating the law; whereas in the case of a ghetto Black, who already is living in conditions as bad as prison (where at least you get fed regularly), the "threat" of prison is not terribly significant. What has he got to lose? Hence, the threat that deters one class of citizens is insufficient to deter another class; and therefore *they must not be given the same penalty, or retributive and therefore social justice is violated.*

It may very well be that for the very downtrodden, the only sufficient deterrent for certain crimes would be the death penalty; anything else would make it *reasonable* for them to violate the law; and this must not be allowed to be the case, if the law is vital to society's survival, such as laws against murder. If the death penalty is then imposed in a "discriminatory" manner, then on this supposition *this is the way things should be, and the opposite would violate social justice.*

For those who say that the death penalty is "final and irrevocable," any penalty is "final and irrevocable" when it is carried out. You can't give back twenty years to a person you have locked into prison and then discovered that he was innocent; and is he *less* badly off than the person who was executed? He is only "objectively" so if death is the end of everything (but it isn't); life that fulfills our moral goals goes on after death; and so it may very well be that the imprisoned person's twenty years of horror is worse (from his point of view, which is the only valid one) than death. There are, for many people, many things that are worse than death.

A positively enormous amount of social injustice has been perpetrated in the name of a social "justice" that is based on

emotional soft-headedness; and the ones hardest hit by this “compassion” are the very ones that were trying to be helped.

Hence, although there can be (and perhaps should be) a “preferential option for the poor,” this must not be at the expense of the rights of the rich. If there is pity for the criminals on death row, this must not be at the expense of encouraging murderers to commit more crimes in the future.

The error I am arguing against (which is in many good people’s minds; even many Bishops’s minds, I am sad to say) comes, in the last analysis, from the assumption that there is an objective “good” and an objective “bad,” and a confusion of “good and bad” and “right and wrong.” It comes from yielding to the serpent’s temptation and saying that God looks on things the way we do, and that if something seems “really bad” to us, then it is “really really *really* bad” to God—when in fact, nothing that happens is bad to God.

Social justice must not be a mask for imposing your own idea of “good” upon an unwilling world; because when you do that, you destroy what is in the name of “improvement,” and the devils you drive away simply wander around the desert until they come back and see the house swept and ready for guests; and then they bring back the seven friends you introduced them to when you kicked them out.

So it is time, I think, to leave the realm of ethics and “the nature of things” and look at how the Christian attitude transforms the social relationship.

The Christian and law

“I have come to fulfill the law, not abolish it.” “The truth will set you free.” “Doing what the Law commands does not make anyone virtuous; a person only gets that way by belief in Jesus as the Prince.”

These statements, as they stand, seem to contradict each other. How can we be free of law if the purpose of Jesus was to fulfill rather than abolish the law? The answer, once again, is that Christianity is a

matter of attitude rather than activity. Paul, who in Galatians, Corinthians, and Romans, says many times that the Law won't save you and that we become virtuous by faith (as I take it, by grace or God's gift), not by what we do, still is quite clear, even in those same letters, that the Christian does not *do* what is contrary to the Law, insofar as he is Christian; and disobedience to the Law is a sign that a person is not Christian.

The Law (the moral law, which can be found in the Ten Commandments), and any law, can be summed up in this: Do not deliberately do harm to yourself, or to anyone else. And this is *fulfilled* by any person who has an attitude of love for himself and everyone else—especially by one who has God's attitude of infinite respect for everyone and everything, including himself. Obviously, such a person would not be interested in harming himself, whether there were any law against it or not; and he would be equally unwilling to harm anyone else. The fact that *if* he chooses to harm anyone, he suffers eternally is not really relevant to him insofar as he has this attitude, because he is not interested in doing these acts in any case.

Now if the threat of punishment is what makes the law a law (because a desired act becomes a *law*, an obligation imposed on the members of a society, when it has this "or else" to motivate systematic behavior), then it follows that a person who wants *a priori* to do what the law commands is simultaneously a person who is free of the law as a law (because what makes it a law does not affect him), and obeys the law (because he does what the law commands). That is, he "obeys" the law only in a loose sense, because, though he *does* what the law commands, he does it *because he wants to, not because he is commanded to*.

Furthermore, the law—any law, again—affects a person only to the extent that the person is looking to his own advantage. The threat of punishment, which makes the law a law, means, "if you don't do what I say, you will suffer"; but if the person commanded does not care whether he suffers or not, how can the law motivate his behavior? This

is one of the problems in dealing with Muslim terrorists who are willing to be tortured and to die in the name of their *jihad*, convinced that they will go straight to heaven if this happens. Nothing you can threaten them with has any effect on what they do. They are free of all *human* law, because they think they are obeying a direct command from God.

Can true Christians be compared to such people? Certainly there are many who call themselves Christians who act this way: we call them “fanatics,” and I think, correctly. They share with those who have the Christian attitude the fact that laws and their sanctions have no motivating force for them; but they are very different from what I consider true Christians, because of their willingness to *disobey* human laws (and even the moral law as it applies to “ordinary” mortals in such minor details as killing people with the bombs you plant) on the grounds that God’s will *contradicts* the human law.

But “I came to fulfill the law, not abolish it.” And “You are to have the same attitude that was in Prince Jesus, who, when he possessed God’s form did not think being equal to God was something he had to keep hold of; he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, and turned himself into what was just the same as a human being; and once he found himself in human form, he lowered himself so far as to *submit obediently* to death, and death on a cross.”

The Christian attitude is to submit obediently; it is a willingness to *obey human laws*, not a desire to disobey them in the name of some Divine call. Those who disobey laws in God’s name consider the laws evil and obedience sinful; they see the laws as bad, and the actions of disobedience and terrorism as “righting wrongs”; and this supposed “divine call” is the *opposite* of God’s point of view. God is not interested in righting wrongs, or there is no God—because if that were the case, the wrongs would not be there in the first place. And, one might say, the last thing God would be interested in would be in “righting” the wrongs by doing something inhuman—even if not *as* inhuman as the wrongs themselves. No, once again, the fanatic who

hears a divine call to disobey is generally the person who projects upon God his own point of view, and is not interested in seeing things from God's point of view.

I hasten to add that there are times when Christians will disobey laws. If a law were to be passed commanding a doctor to perform abortions, the doctor would have to disobey the law; because you can't deliberately choose to kill people. The generals and officials in Germany, if they knew what they were doing, would have had to disobey the orders to kill the Jews. I would have to disobey orders to teach people to use contraceptives, should such orders ever be given. And so on. The moral law never loses its force; and since it forms the basis on which any human law expects to be obeyed, really, then human laws cannot contradict it and must be disobeyed if they do—and those who know that the laws are immoral or unjust must try to change them; and in extreme cases, where the tyranny is widespread, this can sometimes mean defending the people against their own government by revolution.

But this, while legitimate, is the *human* side of the Christian attitude, not the divine one. It occurs when there is *clear knowledge* that the law is immoral and unjust and destructive of the society; in cases of doubt, the benefit of the doubt is to be given to the people in authority, who presumably have more information than you do, and who are to be presumed not to be evil schemers.

On the divine side of the Christian attitude, the interest is in doing what is expected, irrespective of one's own benefit. The Christian simply is not interested in his own benefit, and thus is immediately predisposed to be a good member of the society—because he already *wants* to do what is expected of him, for the sake of the other members, and does not really need the motivation of the threat of punishment. The “other-worldliness” of the Christian makes him a *better* citizen of this world, because the “other world” is the *source* of his attitude, not its locus. It is not that he cares about the other world and can't be bothered about this one; it is that he has the “other

world's" *infinite* love and respect *for this one*, and what he doesn't care about is "how quickly he will make it to heaven" or in any sense how he will be better off if he obeys rather than disobeys.

The tendency of the Christian, then, when confronted with laws or commands or orders is (a) to see the orders as reasonable, irrespective of what benefit they are to him personally, and (b) to be ready to obey them out of respect for the authority and for the other members of the society. He does not repudiate reason and simply blindly obey; but he is willing to recognize that, though rulers can issue irrational orders, they generally speaking are trying to be reasonable, and usually act on consultation, and so have reasons for what they are doing; and since they have access to more information than I have, then if the order does not seem wise to me, this is more likely due to my ignorance than to theirs.

His general attitude is not to sit in judgment upon the orders he is given. He is not running the society, and is willing to do what the society expects of him; and so in this sense, the orders are not looked on by him as good or bad, wise or foolish; they just are, and they are expected, and so he does what he is told. He examines them when only when there is evidence that there is a contradiction between what he is commanded and what he knows he must do; that is, he does not go looking for such evidence, but when it is there, then, knowing that laws were not handed down by God through the "instrumental mouth" of the authority, he will not cooperate with immorality just because he is ordered to do so.

In this case, since he is not predisposed to find out whether what he is told to do is right or wrong, he might actually wind up doing something that is morally wrong. True. So what? He has no intention of deliberately doing wrong; there was no wrong that he could see in doing what he was told (however unwise the order might seem from certain points of view), and so he did it, without examining it carefully.

How terrible! you say. Not at all. All the moral obligation asks is

that we be *morally* certain that the act we choose to do is not wrong, and all moral certainty means is that *you have no evidence now that there is anything wrong with it*, not that, if you dug and dug, you might not find some evidence. You don't have to be able to prove that the act you are contemplating is all right in order to be moral in choosing it; you just need a *lack* of any real reason to believe that there is anything wrong with it. And acting this way, we sometimes do what is wrong. So what?

God is not interested in our avoiding wrong *acts*; he is, so to speak, interested in our not making immoral *choices*. He is "interested" in this to the extent that a person who makes an immoral choice deliberately frustrates himself, and this frustration, if not erased in this life, carries over to eternal frustration. If a person wants to frustrate himself eternally, this is fine with God; but if he doesn't want to, then God will help him avoid the choice. But you can make a moral choice to do a morally wrong act if you have no reason to believe that the act is wrong. Many women, thinking that fetuses are no more human than cysts are, have abortions and are perfectly moral as they pull their babies apart limb from limb; and God is perfectly happy with this.

For those who are shocked at what I just said (though how you can be, if you have read this far, is interesting), I can only say that you are still looking at things in terms of good and bad, which is not the way God looks at them.

And to return to the point, the Christian, who has God's point of view, is not going to examine laws and orders to assure himself beforehand that there is nothing wrong to be found in them before he is willing to obey; his spontaneous tendency is to obey, and to want to obey; and if he *has* evidence that there is something wrong in obeying the law, his *first* tendency will be to *doubt his own evidence* and if there is any reasonable doubt, to give the benefit of the doubt to the authority, and to obey; and *only* if it is morally certain that obedience would involve doing wrong, only then will he disobey.

This is a very different attitude from the one we find in the world

today. The tendency today is to question everything that the authority says, and to be predisposed toward disobedience on the slightest grounds that there might possibly be anything wrong or even unwise in the orders issued.

But of course, the nature of a command is such that it will *always* seem unwise from the point of view of the one who is to obey it; and the reason for this is simple: the command or law commands one of those acts which is *not* for the benefit of the one commanded—one of those cooperative acts which is for the benefit of the others in the society rather than the one commanded—which, of course, is why the threat of punishment is attached to the law, to motivate behavior precisely because it will not seem reasonable otherwise for the member to do what he is told. The action commanded, therefore, is an act that will precisely seem unreasonable from the point of view of the member; and hence if he sits in judgment upon the laws before he “gives his consent,” then he is acting contrary to what being a member means. He will “obey” when the authority does what *he* (the member) thinks best; but authority exists precisely to command what will *not* seem best to the member; and so the member wants the authority to obey *him*, and this kind of “obedience” is the very opposite of obedience.

But the Christian, who is free from the command as a command, is also free from the attitude of sitting in judgment on the wisdom or foolishness of the command; and so his attitude makes him act more consistently with being a member of society than the person who is concerned about whether he should obey commands or not. The spirit of obedience is best maintained by those who, oddly enough, never “obey” in the strict sense at all; who never do what they are told because if they don’t, they will suffer for it.

Once again the Christian paradox fits the Christian better into this world than the atheist, who, of course, is looking to his own interest if he is reasonable. And it is usually the case that the authority, having more information, is in fact commanding things which are to the

long-term interests of the members; and so the Christian is more capable of acting for his own interest than the person who is so concerned for his interest that he questions every order he is given.

Let me mention here that Jesus seems to have been very careful to obey *human* laws and orders, even when unjust and even when they resulted in harm to himself. His behavior at the various stages of his trial is instructive. In the garden, he prayed for the cup to be taken from him, but that God's will be done; it was therefore apparently not inevitable that he be crucified, but depended on *human* choices, and God's will was that the human choices prevail; and they would in fact be to crucify him. When he was taken before Annas, he (rightly) said that evidence should be brought against him by others, and that this person had no authority to make him say anything—which won him a slap, at which he replied, “If I have said anything illegal, bring a charge against me for it; but if what I said was legal, why did you slap me?”

At the trial before the Sanhedrin, he kept silent (as was his right) until the High Priest commanded him in virtue of his authority to say whether he was or was not the Prince; and then (and only then) he answered unequivocally, that he was the Prince and “the Son of God” in the sense that he *was* God—which was the truth, but which he knew would make any devout Jew think he was blaspheming and deserved to die.

When Pilate questioned him, he answered his questions truthfully, and when Pilate seemed to be interested in pursuing his kingship, he gave him a chance to see that he was no threat to Rome and was in fact a king who should be obeyed; something that Pilate refused to accept. After that, Jesus refused to defend himself, though he could perhaps have answered the charges against him to Pilate's satisfaction.

He submitted, in other words, to the legal processes, in spite of the fact that human misinterpretation of him—and legitimate human misinterpretation (“They do not know what they are doing” was spoken by a Divine mouth, remember)—was bound to occur and to

lead to his horrible death. In obeying God, he obeyed human institutions. He did not sit in judgment on the validity of the trial at night, question the right of the High Priest or Pilate to interrogate him, complain that he had been condemned by statements uttered at his trial by himself, and all the rest of the irregularities that a legal mind could have found with his condemnation; he submitted to a human institution which was operating in a human manner, and which in all likelihood was doing what the people involved considered the only reasonable and right thing (“Isn’t it better for one man to die rather than to have the whole nation destroyed?”). What they did was a horrible crime; they killed their God; but they could not believe it was their God. They thought they were killing a man who claimed to be their God—a blasphemer; and God himself commanded them to kill blasphemers. And he submitted to the error, and was killed—and used the death to redeem us all.

And, since he told us to take up our own crosses and follow him, part of this, if my analysis above is correct, is that we too are to submit to authority, even when it tells us to do things that are not good for us, are not wise, and possibly even when it violates our rights. “It is a good thing not to stand up for your rights (which is what it is to be meek, in practice),” he said right at the beginning of his ministry.

So I take it that the spirit of Christianity is the spirit of obedience; and not obedience to the “holy spirit” in spite of “human law,” but obedience to all authority (“Slaves, be obedient to your earthly masters, as if they were the Prince Himself”)—saving only that we cannot repudiate the human attitude of never obeying when it is clearly evident that to do so would be morally wrong.

The Religious and the layman

Here I want to look at the relationship of the Christian to the society he is in in terms of a kind of distinction between the Religious and the lay states of life, because a major difference between the

Religious and the layman is that the former joins a special society whose function is his Christian development, while the layman is, Christianly speaking, on his own. I realize that the layman belongs to the society called the Church; but this is a very special kind of society that does not have some of the characteristics that a normal society has; and so I will treat the layman in the Church separately.

The distinction I am interested in here is that, whether or not a Religious lives with his community (and in the normal case, he does), his spiritual life turns on the fact that he belongs to it; but the layman has no special group on which his Christian development depends, and so if he belongs to a Christian group, this is incidental to his life as a layman.

It would be well to keep this in mind, because in our age of group-think, we more or less automatically feel that in order to succeed in anything, you have to organize. But I submit that it is this attitude more than anything else which is tending to turn laymen into rather inefficient Religious, and preventing them from standing on their own secular feet. I am not against laymen joining groups and societies, even those that are avowedly Christian; but the layman should recognize that "belonging" is not the way for him to find the truth about his lay life; and so he really ought to have some other purpose in mind than "advancement in perfection" or "Christianity" or whatever the current phrase is, if he decides to join something.

But in spite of the fact that I am distinguishing the layman from the Religious here, it should also be kept in mind that much of what is said about Religious will apply to laymen insofar as they belong to groups, Christian or not. What I want to do is to use the formality of speaking about the Religious life here to contrast it with the on-his-ownness of the layman; and in this way I can kill two birds with one stone.

Now then, Religious congregations have many different goals, but among them is always the fact that they exist for the advancement in Christianity of the members. It follows from this that the Religious'

advancement in Christianity depends on the interaction and cooperation of the other members of the group with himself; they must at times help him in being Christian, and he must at times help them. The Religious, then, just because of his state in life, cannot be Christian on his own; if he tries, he is contradicting the fact that he is a member of the community. I mean this, of course, in a negative sense: he cannot resent or try to prevent the interference of others in his spiritual life, precisely because one of the goals of the group's cooperative activity is just this interference.

Here is the major difference between the Christian and the layman; the layman can quite consistently say that his spiritual life is nobody's business but his own, while the Religious has made it (by joining the congregation) in part the business of the other members of his community.

Note that it is a misinterpretation of a marriage as if it were a small Religious community that says that one of the functions of the marriage is to "help each other attain Christian perfection." The function of the marriage is *rational sexuality*, not "attainment of Christian perfection." It involves *love* for the other person, not "desire for his advancement in holiness," which is an imposition of one's own standards of goodness on the other person, and is a refusal to respect the other's self-determination and goal-setting. Love, and especially marital love, is a *respect for the other person as he is*, not a "desire to see to it that he improves." It is *ready* to help the other when he asks for it, and to be there when he needs encouragement, and to be *willing to be used*, but it is precisely *not* interference, curiosity about his spiritual state, evaluations of "progress," and emphatically not "correction of faults." All of this is an essentially Religious attitude, not a lay one; and if you find it in Christian marriage manuals, this is because they can trace the origin of what is said in them back to thinkers who were Religious.

But in a Religious congregation, this involvement of others in one's most intimate relation with God is precisely what the

congregation is about. But the caveat here is that it is an involvement by the *congregation as such*, and this does *not* mean an indiscriminate busboddiness of each member in the other members' lives. The involvement is a structured one, governed by the laws of the congregation, and is fundamentally an involvement by the authority and delegates of the authority. And therefore, it is quite legitimate for a Religious to have a healthy resentment when some other member of the congregation takes it upon himself to set him straight about some fault of his (usually in the name of "fraternal correction"); but he has no right to feel put upon when the rules tell him he has to reveal his conscience to a spiritual advisor and listen to his advice.

This is a hard saying, I realize, in several senses. There are many Religious today who feel that one's personal relation with God should be untouchable; but in this, they have the lay attitude, not the Religious one. There are also many who have the "democratic" view of Religious life, and think that everybody else's spiritual development but their own is their business, and who spend their lives going around and seeing to it that everyone else lives up to the mark. Group sessions with such people in them (and why is there at least one in every group?) are not calculated to promote Christian joy.

Notice that, even in the lay life, when you join a society, then the actions that deal with the purpose of the society are in some measure taken out of your hands. The goal is to be achieved together, which means that each person must do at times what does not seem best to him, and submit to the involvement of others in what he is doing. This would be interference *if* one were not in a group; but it should be regarded as something like "team effort," where you don't make the spectacular play because it doesn't advance the *team's* goals.

That is, a person in a group should foster the attitude that "we" are doing what he is doing, rather than that "I" am; then the fact that things do not always go the way he planned them is consistent with, not contrary to, his orientation.

For the Religious, the cultivation of this attitude is especially

necessary, because one's own spiritual development is what "we" do, rather than what "I" do. Or rather, God in any case is doing it in and to us; but in the lay situation, God is doing it to me and in me directly, as it were; and in the Religious life, God is doing it to me and in me through the externality of the group's interference in my life. When the layman belongs to (secular) groups, God is making him Christian in the context of the secular purpose of the group, by having him take over the Divine attitude toward the task of the group, the people in the group, and the respect for authority; but this "advancement in Christianity" is not explicit; what "we" are doing is not advancing in Christianity, but making music, say, and what "I" am doing in making music in the group Christianly, is advancing in Christianity. But in the case of the Religious, what "we" are doing is advancing in Christianity together, and I am cooperating in this advance of us all.

Responsibility in a group

This leads to the question of the responsibility of a member of a society, which currently is of great concern to Religious; and which, I think, is being totally misinterpreted, so that in the name of "acting responsibly" Religious are taking on a lay kind of responsibility and *shirking the real responsibility they have in the process*.

I might point out here that many is the Religious who left his congregation because he couldn't stand "holy obedience," and then found to his dismay that once he got out into the workplace, there was a secular version of "holy obedience" that was twenty times as strict and interfering in his life (telling you that your shoes need shining, for instance) as any that he had left, and which had no concern with his personal feelings or his advancement in anything except the corporate structure. I say this mainly for any Religious who may be reading this and chafing at what they think is undue interference in their lives. I think much of the interference by

businesses in the personal lives of their employees is morally wrong; but the fact is that it happens, and in the “real world,” it is taken for granted. Everyone wears a uniform nowadays, for instance, except Religious—who are supposed to wear one—and college professors, who have tenure, and who don’t know what they’re doing anyway.

But to return to the point, let us first of all be clear on what “responsibility” really means. It is *not* the same as “duty” or “obligation,” though the word is often used (analogously) in that sense. When you talk about the “responsibilities of a chairman,” you are talking about his *duties*, on the grounds that if certain actions are *not* carried out, then *he is the one you blame for the omission*.

And that is what responsibility entails. It rests on the fact that when I *choose* to do something, the act I choose to do is in my control; it could have been done or not done. To the extent that I couldn’t control it, then to that extent I am not responsible for it. Thus *responsibility for an act means that that act would have been different had you chosen differently*.

It deals with acts *done*, not what is in the future. The act is *yours* because your choice made it be that way; and it would not have been that way had you not chosen so—and you could have chosen differently, since you are free.

Now then, this “control” that we have because of the fact that we “could have chosen differently” has several levels; and therefore, there are different kinds of and degrees of responsibility for what is done.

The lowest level is what I call “physical” responsibility. You *did* choose to perform the act, even if you may have been “compelled” to choose the act by the fact that the alternative was either immoral or so horrible that you couldn’t face it, or that you were so blinded by your emotions that you couldn’t actually see any alternative at the time. In that sense, an insane person who chooses to kill someone else because he thinks the other person is an alien who is about to destroy the world is *physically* responsible for the death of an innocent person, because he *did* make the choice. But obviously, he would not be

regarded as “responsible” in a meaningful sense for what he did. Similarly, a woman who has an abortion, without any idea that her fetus is a human being, is physically responsible for dismembering her child; but she is not *morally* responsible for this, since she has no idea she is doing it.

At the other extreme, there is *moral* responsibility, which means that you chose the act, *knowing and accepting the reality of the act and its consequences*. A woman who has an abortion and knows that this is her child, is morally responsible for the dismemberment of her child.

In the middle, there is what I call “legal responsibility,” not because it is always what you are legally responsible for, but because it is the *type* of responsibility that is used in law. If you violate a law by accident (as when you run over someone because your car’s steering suddenly broke, though you had had it safety-checked the day before), then, since you chose to drive the car, you are physically responsible for killing the person. But no reasonable government would want to prosecute a person for this kind of thing, because there was not any *meaningful* control over the act. On the other hand, if the government relies on *moral* responsibility, which rests on the knowledge the person had when he made the choice, this knowledge is hidden to anyone but the person, and if he says, “I didn’t know the gun was loaded,” there is no way absolutely to prove that this statement is not true; and therefore anyone could escape punishment by lying about his knowledge of the law at the time. In that case, you could forget about laws and their sanctions.

To avoid the cruelty of punishing people for mere physical responsibility and the impossibility of knowing what was going on in a person’s mind when he made the choice, law resorts to a mental fiction that I called “legal responsibility.” It assumes that if you didn’t know what the law was (or that the gun was loaded, or whatever), you *should* have, because “any normal person would have known the law, or checked the gun”; and therefore, *you are held responsible for your lack of knowledge, and consequently for your act*. That is, you are legally

responsible for what the “normal person” would be *morally* responsible for. If you just didn’t advert to what you were doing, that’s too bad; from the law’s point of view, you should have.

Those are the basic kinds of responsibility. Moral responsibility, which is the most important one for our purposes, has several levels, depending on how clear your knowledge *at the time of the choice* was, and how capable you were of carrying out your choice (i.e. how much your emotions may have prevented you from doing what you actually chose to do). If you were so blinded by your emotions that you didn’t realize what you were doing, you weren’t morally responsible for the act at all; if you were somewhat blinded, but still aware of the act and some or all of its implications, you are somewhat responsible for it—though the act *as you chose it* isn’t the act as it occurred, because you didn’t see all of the implications. And so on.

In general, it is extremely difficult to know just how responsible you are for any given act, especially when emotions are involved (as they almost always are). After the fact, you are aware of information that it might seem you were aware of at the time; but the emotions may have been clouding it or totally blinding you to some of it. You might also think, after the fact, that you chose to do the act reluctantly, when in fact what happened was that at the time, you chose *not* to do it and did it in spite of yourself; and you are now arguing that, since you knowingly *did* it, you must have chosen to do it.

And so on. I think you can see that, not only can we not really judge others, we can’t even judge ourselves. St. Paul says as much in First Corinthians: “I don’t even evaluate myself; I am not aware of anything wrong in what I have been doing, but this does not get me acquitted; because the judge in the court I care about is the Master.”

And, of course, it doesn’t matter how responsible you actually were when you made the choice. If this were an ethical universe, your eternal destiny would depend on it; but if it were an ethical universe, once you had committed the choice, you would be stuck with it

anyhow, without the slightest possibility of altering or removing it—in which case, it's too late to worry about it. But in the real world, the sinfulness of the choice is removed by your Master, who can't be bothered in “how sinful” it was; and if He can't be bothered, why are you concerned?

In any case, you are responsible for what you have control over by your choices, and you are responsible to the extent that your choice controlled the act.

It follows from this that *when you are in a society, you are not responsible for what you do when obeying legitimate commands*. The reason is that when you join a society, you are then *morally bound* to obey, unless the command exceeds the authority (i.e. it is to do something that has no connection with the society's common goal or common good, or violates a right of yours, or is to do something immoral). Even if the command is foolish, you must obey it.

But if you *must* obey, then morally speaking what you do is out of your control, since it would be immoral to disobey. Hence, the *person who issues the command* is responsible for what *you* do, and *you are not*. This is simply due to the nature of a society and authority. The authority has the control, not the member.

Note that you cannot “take” or “assume” the responsibility for the act; responsibility is something you *have*, not something you “accept”; and if you don't have it, you don't have it. If you *want* to be responsible for doing the act that the commander tells you to do, this doesn't make you responsible for it, because there was no moral way you could have prevented doing it; so morally speaking it is his act and not yours.

Religious lately have been resenting this, because as “adults” they want to “take responsibility for their own acts,” and so they don't like the idea that the control of their acts is someone else's. But in a broader sense, this desire to take *back* control is a *shirking* of the responsibility they have over being good members of the congregation. That is, when they *joined* the congregation, they *chose*

to hand over control of their acts to the superior; and therefore, they are responsible for *this* choice and its consequences. What they don't want, really, then, is to be responsible for the consequences of their original choice to join the congregation. But they *are* responsible for this choice; and this choice makes them *not* responsible for their acts when following orders. So their desire to "be responsible" is an irresponsible desire; it is a childish yearning to get out of a commitment that was made earlier in life. Adults live up to their commitments.

This is one of the ways in which Religious are trying to "laicize" their lives, and are contradicting their nature as Religious. (The other obvious way is that silliness about having money, which gives you all of the curses of poverty, the worry and so on, without the blessing of forgetting about money that Religious poverty is supposed to be.) Instead of rejoicing that they are free of responsibility for individual acts under orders, Religious have got themselves into a crazy state of "consultation" where the superior and you "discuss" things so that he orders you to do what you want him to order you to do, on the supposition that this is "discerning where the Holy Spirit is leading."

But there is a qualification to this lack of responsibility, which is connected with a correct sense of "consultation." The person issuing commands may be said to be the "will" of the society; but his mind is *not* the society's *mind*. He does not have either all the information the society possesses, nor, however wise he might be, is he possessed of all of the wisdom of the society as a whole. He is the *spokesman* of the society as a society toward its members, but *his* task is to find out what the *society* should be telling its members to do, and issue *those* orders.

People in authority are not given any special "grace of office" or "wisdom" by God, just because they have been elected or appointed. They are just as stupid and foolish as they were when they were out of authority, as anyone who has been in a society and seen members lifted out of their lowly state to authority can testify. The assumption

that God gives a special grace to authorities—particularly to Religious superiors—is based on two things: (a) that the members *have* to obey the superior, and (b) that God wants certain things done.

But in point of fact, God has no special plans for this world; this world is free, at least insofar as it is the effect of our free choices. And if those choices are foolish, then this is fine with God; and if they lead to disasters, God is not going to “r’ar back and pass a miracle” to save us from our folly. You would think we would have learned this after so many thousands of years. In the eternal scheme of things, what happens here is not important.

Now what this means is that those in authority, and especially Religious superiors, have a special obligation: to seek out information and defer to those wiser than themselves. From which it follows that those members who *have* information and/or wisdom have an obligation to provide it to the person in authority.

And it follows from *this* that if a given order is given which you know is foolish because you happen to know something that the superior doesn’t, *you are now responsible for^{his} foolish command and its consequences, since you could have prevented it by informing him.* You are responsible for what you have control over. If you *refuse* to inform your superior, you become responsible for *what^{he} does because of the lack of information.*

The point is that when you are in a society, you are responsible for what *other* people do, because you have some control, either direct or indirect, over what they do. When a superior issues orders, they are apt to affect many people in the congregation; and if you could have provided “input” in the form of facts or wise advice and you didn’t, then you have control over the effects on these other people.

Well, but suppose the superior doesn’t believe your facts, or won’t listen to your wise advice, and he issues the order you know is foolish. Then *you* have discharged your responsibility, and are not now responsible for the foolish order (which, of course, you must obey).

And I think it a sign of the laicization of the Religious life that this

“consultation” that goes on is not really by way of informing the superior about some course of action the superior is contemplating; it is really about what the *member* wants to do. The superior is no longer in a position, it seems, to decide what the best task for the *congregation* would be; because this “discernment” process ties his hands, and he has to let the members go where they think the Spirit is leading them—when in fact the Spirit is leading them where the superior tells them to go, no matter whether he does it by listening to the vagaries of their emotional states or by (as it used to be) simply placing them where they were “needed,” irrespective of how they felt about it.

The words “democracy” and especially “collegiality” have made a mockery out of the Religious life lately; and they are ways in which Religious are reneging on their real responsibility for the misinformed and misguided commands of their superiors in the name of “taking personal responsibility for their own acts.” “Collegiality” is a particularly inappropriate term. It refers to the fact that each Bishop is the *direct* representative of Jesus in his diocese—but only insofar as he is not contradicting the teaching of Jesus, which is the teaching of the Bishops as a whole in time and space: the “college” of the Bishops as “colleagues.”

The relationship between the Holy Spirit and the superior and the members of an order is *not* “collegiality.” Members are under obedience to superiors in a sense in which Bishops are not under obedience to the Pope, who is the spokesman for the *doctrine* of the Bishops as a college, but cannot *command* this doctrine; it is the doctrine of Jesus, and the Pope has no more control over it than any other Bishop has; it is just that when he says that Jesus’ teaching is such-and-such, he is not making a mistake; and if any other Bishop says that Jesus’ teaching is such-and-such, then he is making a mistake if he contradicts what either an ecumenical council or the Pope says it is. The Pope’s “authority” over the Bishops is an authority in the sense in which Webster is an authority on the meaning of words, not

in the sense that the city council is the authority in the city.

Nevertheless, the “consultation” mode of governance—if you can call it governance—is a perversion of a step taken in the right direction. The old “mother superior” or “father superior” mode of governance, where the congregation was likened to a family of which the superior was the parent was a perversion in the other direction. The reason parents have authority over their children is that parents are more informed and wiser than their children; and their authority lessens as the children advance in information and wisdom.

Religious superiors have no superior knowledge or wisdom; and therefore, it is wrong for them to act like parents. They must consult, as I said; but not consult the *wishes* of the members; they must consult the *information and wisdom* of the members: the *intellectual contents of the members' minds*.

In this, democracy is a terrible model for Religious congregations. Democracy, of course, assumes that there is a special “grace” or “wisdom” that resides in the people, so that the wishes of the majority will be what is best for the society as a whole. But in general, the majority of people are not the wisest; the majority are pretty badly informed and not aware of the implications of what they want; and so there is almost a guarantee that if the majority get their way, the wisest course of action will *not* be followed—and many minorities will actually have their rights trampled on. The majority base their vote on what they *feel* and what they *want*, not on facts or what is best for the group as a whole.

Why does democracy work in the United States, then? First of all, because the laws are not made by majority vote, but by a small elite, who are elected; there are various roadblocks in the way of the majority's simply getting what they want. Secondly, we are talking, in the case of the United States, of a *civil* society, whose precise function is for people to be left alone to do what they want insofar as this is possible without actually violating anyone else's rights. The United States as a society has no function beyond this. Obviously, then, the

laws should facilitate whatever it is that the people want, always keeping in mind the non-violation of anyone's rights.

But in some society like a Religious congregation which has a special function, like, for example, the Christian advancement of the members through poverty, chastity, and obedience, in the service of the education of the young—then what the members *want* is secondary to what achieves the purpose of the congregation. I know of orders like this where very few of the members are actually teaching, presumably because “discernment” told them that the Spirit was leading them into social work or library science or manning soup kitchens. All these are laudable; but why did these people join a congregation devoted to *teaching*? That is, when these people “discern,” then presumably they should be trying to find out how they can best promote the stated purpose of the congregation, not how they can distort the meaning of the constitution so that it suits their inclinations. And superiors should not permit this silliness; superiors are shirking their responsibility when they let the members have the control over what they do. Consultation should give the superior information on what the member likes and so on; and the superior should take this into account, not be bound by it.

But this is not all there is to responsibility in a society. When a member acts, then the society is acting in and through him. The society, after all, has no ability to act except in the actions of the members.

It follows from this that *every act of a member, when he is identifiable as a member, is also an act of the society as such*. The member is *never* on his own, and what he does, the society does in him (even when he is not particularly following orders). I remember one nun years ago complaining to me, “Every time I open my mouth, they all take it that the congregation is talking; they never take what I say as just mine.” Well of course not. Nothing she ever said *was* “just” hers. She was not the official spokesman for the congregation, but when she spoke, then in a secondary sense, the congregation

spoke also—as is clear from the fact that the congregation could have silenced her if it chose.

Thus, a member who acts has a responsibility for *the effect of his acts on the reputation of the society, because his acts will legitimately be attributed to the society* to the extent that he is identifiable as a member.

A third phase of the laicization of the Religious life is that Religious are no longer easy to identify as members of their congregations. Orders from Rome have gone out time and again that congregations should wear a “distinctive habit” as a sign of their difference and commitment to their way of life; and the “habit” has been interpreted—I have actually heard it so interpreted—as “not wearing designer clothes,” or having on a little pin.

The idea is supposed to be that you can do your work better and relate to the people you are serving better if you don’t look different; and there may be something in this. But it is also true that people resent it if they find out that you are a monk, because they—rightly—think that they should act differently toward a monk who is a representative of a special commitment to a religion which they respect than the way they would act to another layman or even one not of their religion at all.

Monks and nuns who think that laymen *ought* not to act differently toward them simply do not recognize what it means to be a member of a society. They want to be accepted “for themselves” and not “for what they belong to”; but “what they belong to” in their case forms a large part of what the *definition* of their “self” is. They cannot divorce the two; and the attempt to *disguise* what they are by dressing just like everyone else is just that: an attempt to disguise what they are, and evade the responsibility they have to the society by not being identifiable as members of it until after the fact of their membership has been revealed.

And it is not the case that the Christian work of monks and nuns is better done if people can’t tell that they’re monks and nuns.

Statements about Jesus and Christianity are resented as fanatical or pious mouthings when spoken from one layman to another (as if the one saying it is trying to be “holier than thou”); but Religious are *supposed* to see things in the light of eternity, and are not putting laymen down when they speak of things in the light in which they see them; laymen’s functions are different, as I hope I have begun to show in all of these pages.

So Religious can do their work with layman properly only if the laymen recognize that they are Religious, and can expect the point of view of Religious from them. Laymen have a right to know who they are dealing with, so they won’t be put into false positions. Religious should be identifiable by their dress, and not by their “works,” which are inconsistent if done by lay Christians, but perfectly sensible if done by Religious. The idea that the monk or nun will be identifiable by his lifestyle is a fallacy; if his lifestyle is that of a monk and his habit is that of a hippie, his lifestyle will be misinterpreted.

To sum up, a member of a society is responsible for what he does in informing his superior so that the superior can issue sensible orders; he is responsible for the effect on the society of whatever he does to others outside the society; but he is not responsible for what he does under orders, unless the orders are illegitimate (in which case, he is responsible for obeying, since he shouldn’t do so).

Religious, then, should carefully examine the responsibility they *have* and see to it that they are living up to it like adults (who act in accordance with their real responsibilities); and they should enjoy their freedom from responsibility when they are in fact free from it.

Now then, let me resume the difference between the Christian life of the Religious and that of the layman. In the first place, the Religious’ Christian acts always involve the whole congregation, because whenever he acts, the congregation is acting in his action. When the layman acts, these acts are his and his alone. He is not, as we will see, the Church acting; the Church, as a visible society, exists for the layman, and though as a *community* it includes the layman, he

is more or less in the position of a student in a school, where nothing can be demanded of him that is not for *his own* development. The *society* which is the Church (i.e. the organization which can demand under threat acts objectively not beneficial to the agent) is the clergy, and does not include the laity.

Secondly, the Religious has an obligation to see to it that the congregation knows what he is doing and approves of it; it would be wrong for him simply to go ahead and do something without bothering to find out if the superior (i.e. the congregation as such) wanted him to do it—because what he does is what the congregation does, and this is supposed to be under the control of the superior.

The layman's Christian work, on the other hand, is not, strictly speaking, under the guidance of the Bishops and priests of his area, and is usually not even known by them. Nor is his work under their control, except in a negative sense; if what he is doing is contrary to Church teaching or practice, they can veto it, by declaring that what he is doing is not Christian and should be stopped. But in so doing, they are *informing* him, really, rather than commanding him. We will see this later. They can also *suggest* ways he could help the Church and do some work they would like to see done; but this is always a suggestion, never a command. The layman, in his Christian activity, is under the *direct* guidance of the Holy Spirit (i.e. not under the Holy Spirit *through* the hierarchy); and so is on his own. The hierarchy serves him, basically by providing information as to whether what he thinks is an inspiration is from the Holy Spirit.

The Christian bureaucrat

But before I get deeper into the relation between the layman and the Church, let me briefly talk about a couple of ways in which the Christian attitude can help transform secular societies: specifically, how the Christian in management can make management be what it can be, and how you can be a Christian politician. In both of these cases,

the first reaction is to say that these things are irredeemable; but I think that the problem lies in attitude rather than structure; and so the redemption of bureaucracy and politics is fair game for the Christian.

The general attitude toward management is that it is an instrument for greed; and the general attitude toward bureaucracy is that it is as inhuman a way of getting things done as any that has ever been devised. And I think this is true of both in their fallen state; but I don't think it is built into the nature of either.

In the first place, the "greed" aspect of management is based on the fallacy that a business exists *solely* to provide profit for the investor, and therefore the manager's sole function is to maximize profit. Everything else—the product or service provided to the consumer, the working conditions of the "help"—is supposed to be a means toward this end.

But in point of fact, as I have argued in *The Moral Dimension of Human Economic Life*, any business with employees has three *coordinate* purposes: (a) providing a service or product to the consumer, (b) providing opportunity for human work or service to the employees, and (c) providing compensation for the investor's service of sinking his money into the firm and taking ultimate responsibility for its actions. None of these purposes is subordinate to any other one, whatever the *motivations* of the founder of the business might be.

But since these are coordinate purposes of the firm as such, it follows that the function of management is to see to it that *all* are realized, and that none is sacrificed to the fulfillment of any other. Providing shoddy products because that's the best way to maximize profits is wrong and must not be a goal of management; providing excellent products and good profit cannot be done if this means inhuman working conditions; and so on.

Now then, the "entrepreneur" nowadays, in firms where "management" is meaningful, is generally not some one or few individuals, but thousands of people, very few of whom have enough shares of

stock to be able to influence what management does in any significant way. Therefore, in practice, what large firms do is not what the *investors* want, but what *management* wants.

Hence, management has a rather free hand, in practice, in deciding the policy of the firm; if the top management wants to take the economics textbooks at face value and make “profit” the only goal, no one is going to stop them; but if they want to make quality products and good working conditions and salaries equal to profit on the priorities list, no one is really going to stand in the way either.

And since these are the purposes of the firm as such, then the Christian manager, who sees this, need not have any fear that his Christian respect for workers and consumers is making him do bad business if he does not subordinate them to the profit of the investors. Profit is not a dirty word to him, because investors do deserve compensation for their service in investing their money in the firm; but inordinate profit is just that: a disorder, and the Christian can see that, because he can see the firm as it is in itself, and not as it is in the subjective eyes of the investors.

So much for greed. What about bureaucracy?

What a bureaucratic structure actually is is “layers of authority.” That is, *what* can be commanded is structured, so that at each layer, the people who issue commands have *room to be free*, and are not simply slaves of those higher up.

What I mean is this. Top management sets the *goals* of the firm or organization, and the basic priorities—but it has nothing to do with the day-to-day operations of the organization. The next lower level takes these goals and tries to figure out how basically these can be achieved: and this level sets as goals for the one below it the *basic* means for implementing the goals set at the top. The next level down takes these as its goals and sets as goals for the following level the basic means to implement them; and so on down the line, until you get to the person who is the worker, who simply follows the orders and doesn’t give any.

The point is that what the people three steps down from the top are doing is using their own ingenuity to figure out how to implement the task assigned them from the second level down; and in general *how* they do this task is up to them, and is none of the business of the second level: the business of the second level is *what the task is, and whether it is done*, not *how* it is done.

Thus, bureaucracy, by keeping top management from meddling in the “how” of things, leaves them free to set the tone of the firm as a whole, and still leaves their subordinates free to work as humans *within* that tone. Since humans are free beings, then bureaucracy is *in itself the most human way to get complex tasks done*, because many people are being treated as responsible human beings, not simply machines used by the people at the top.

Now of course, the people at the top have to know whether the task they assign *is* in fact being done, and that in the process no one’s rights are violated in the doing of it; and so they have to be informed about what is going on at lower levels. But this information *should not concern itself with the “how” but with the “whether” the task is being humanly done*.

The problem in bureaucracy occurs here. Upper levels of management are not really clear about what their role is on what goes on at lower levels; and they are apt to interfere in the “how,” because certain methods for them are “better,” and those at lower levels aren’t doing things in the “right” way, even if the right things are getting done. This is interference.

And those in lower levels are uncomfortable with this freedom-with-limitations. They are apt to see that, if they do something in a way that seems not the “right” way to those higher up, they suffer; and so they tend to protect themselves by not doing anything on their own and waiting for orders before they will try a method, of pestering those above them about questions of methods and means, of keeping secrets from them about things that didn’t go right. Communications either are too extensive or too little. The upper

levels of management get a distorted picture of what goes on, and are told what the lower levels think they want to hear; and the result is worse than having them try to undertake the whole operation themselves.

The obvious solution is that there must be trust in the organization, based on the knowledge by subordinates that they will be left alone to exercise the authority they have on their own level, and will be judged on results and non-violations of rights, not on evaluations of methods. Those at the top must be *really willing* to let subordinates have free rein within the limits set for them; and this takes the attitude of “letting go,” and *really* delegating *authority*, not just the appearance of it.

But this, as I said at the beginning, is a question of attitude, not particularly anything distinctive you do; and the Christian, who sees things and people as they are, and who knows that the Master is running the universe, will be less unwilling to let go than the boss who is afraid that he will be taken advantage of.

And the result? Happy people are people who can set out to accomplish something and succeed. If you let subordinates know that they have a range in which they are free to try what they want in accomplishing the goals you set for them, then they have room to try and to succeed. If you are willing to let them experiment and perhaps fail; if you are available to help them, but aren't always looking over their shoulder; then you have succeeded in one of the purposes of the firm: making the firm a place where humans can work humanly.

No easy task, this; but it is not my purpose here to define it more exactly. It is for the Christian in management to try to make bureaucracy be what it can be.

The Christian politician

If politics is the art of compromise, and if the Christian is principled, then it would seem that at last we have come up with

something that contradicts what being a Christian is. In order to get done what needs to get done—in order to get elected in the first place—you have to lie a little, deceive a little, cheat a little.

Or do you?

The function, as I said, of civil society is to see to it that no one's rights are violated and that everyone free to do whatever he wants, consistent with no one's rights being violated. There is nothing unChristian or immoral in this.

Yes, but how do you go about getting elected, in the real world? Don't you have to tell people what they want to hear? You would have to do this unless you subscribe to the opposite fallacy to the "grace of office," (where supposedly the one in authority automatically has the wisdom to do the right thing), and say that the majority of the people in a democracy automatically know what the common good (the non-violation of anyone's rights) in practice is, and automatically want the concrete act that won't result in the violation of any rights. I think the fact that the majority are in favor of abortion at the moment is sufficient refutation of this.

But it is not necessary to beat people over the head with what they *don't* want to hear. The people do not have a right to know *everything* about a candidate; and while he must answer truthfully if asked something point-blank, it is permitted to be evasive when dealing with questions whose candid answers would lead to undesirable results.

It sounds as if my Jesuit training is now coming into its own. But let us be clear on this. The supposition is that something the people "want to hear" is something the Christian cannot legislate in favor of, because someone's right will be violated—like abortion, say. No Christian who knows that the fetus has rights can vote in favor of abortion. But if you happen to be in a district which is heavily "pro-choice," as they say, (a) the people in your district want something they have no right to have, and consequently (b) they "want to hear" from you that you will give it to them—something they have no right to hear. The same would apply to a person running

for office in a neo-Nazi or White Supremacist district.

Representing the people in such districts *cannot* mean doing what they want done, because what they want done violates what they are in a society for, whether they realize it or not. Obviously, what has to be done in the long run is educate them; but this does not solve the immediate problem. Not running for office (and therefore leaving the field to those who will support what the people want done) encourages the violations of rights. But running as a crusader against the entrenched notions of the people can in practice be the same as not running at all.

Thus, if the people *in their humanity* are to be represented, then the person who knows that their will violates others' rights has a reason for not being candid. Otherwise, the people's unthought-out desires will be represented, and citizens will have their rights taken away from them.

This is the reality of what it means to run for office in a society which consists of people who are not necessarily gifted with supernatural wisdom—where you know more than they do. This is heresy to the American mentality. Who are you, you elitist, to say that you know better than the people as a whole? Well, at one time, “the people as a whole” thought that slavery was all right. Does that mean that those who realized it was wrong should have cringed at their “elitism”? The people as a whole at one time thought the earth was flat; the people as a whole thought in Galileo's time that the sun went round the earth.

Note, however, that what we are talking about here is not “knowing what is good for the people,” but knowing right from wrong. The fallacy above is no fallacy when it comes to whether the government or the people (i.e. the individuals themselves) know “what is good for them.” There *is no* objective “good” for anyone except what the person himself freely defines as his “good”; and therefore no one knows what is good for me except me. I have said this time and again.

Hence, the Christian in politics is aware of the fact that government's function is *not* to do what is "good for" the people, but to *leave them alone*, except when they want to do something that violates someone else's right.

Thus, even if it were possible to bring about greater prosperity by tinkering with the economy by fiscal and monetary policy (going into debt, raising interest rates, and so on a la John Maynard Keynes), I would have serious doubts as to whether the government should get involved in this, except to correct some situation where some citizens' rights would be violated were it not done. In the real world, this economic tinkering is probably effective in altering the country's economy—but in what direction is problematic, as we can see from the experience of the past forty years.

Maybe I can put what I want to say this way: The Christian politician, both in getting elected and in legislating when elected, has to be an expert in what the ethicists call the "Principle of the Double Effect": how to do something which involves something wrong without actually choosing the wrongness. Evils, in other words, must be permitted (never chosen) in order to avoid worse situations.

And, oddly enough, it is easier for the Christian to do this, perhaps, than the non-Christian, because the Christian is not committed to the proposition that "the good must be done." God is not interested in having evils eradicated and good replace them; he is simply interested in helping the world be what it is.

If, for instance, it is not practically possible to prevent the slaughter of our unborn children immediately, the Christian politician will not commit himself to senseless gestures "on the side of the angels," but will consider legislation that can improve the situation and will lead in the desired direction. And if he fails—well, so did his Master.

The point I am making is that it is quite possible to be pragmatic and be a Christian. Thus, there can be such a thing as a Christian politician. More than this I can't see at the moment from my ivory tower.

The layman in the Church

We come now to the relation between the layman and the Church of which he is a member. As a Catholic, I of course am going to be talking mainly about membership in the Catholic Church (or for those of you who resent this name, the Roman Catholic Church); so let me say what I think first about the many Christian Churches.

The People of God, as it is now called, or the Mystical Body of Christ, as it used to be called, following Paul's way of expressing things, consists, in its fullness, of every person who lives with the life of the Holy Spirit in addition to his natural life. Anyone who shares this life is in fact Jesus, who is the human expression of the life of God in the world.

This, it seems to me, includes vast (I hope) numbers of people who do not belong to that sociological entity I called the Catholic Church, and probably excludes some (and I hope not many) who are actually enrolled in it, and who have been baptized and so on. Anyone who gets baptized, for instance, for purely social reasons such as to avoid persecution, and who has no belief in Jesus as God, is externally a Catholic, but has not, I would think, what it takes to be a Christian.

It is quite possible that Buddhists and Jews and other sincere non-Christians in fact belong to the People of God. We could not say that they are Christians (and in fact they aren't, because they don't believe that Jesus is God); but we cannot exclude the fact that God has used their sincere disbelief in Christianity and belief in whatever their religion teaches to bestow his life on them. This, by the way, is teaching that has always been held by the Catholic Church, if not by everyone in it.

Why then is there such a thing as the sociological entity called the Catholic Church? I think that it must exist, for two reasons: First, because it is nonsense to say that we are all "united" but there is no visible sign of this union at all: that we are united purely internally, and this internal union, which makes us all one Person, in fact, finds

no visible expression whatsoever. That is absurd. If the indwelling of the Holy Spirit unites us, this will spill over into an interactive cooperation among the people so united.

Thus, though Luther perhaps was on target in stressing that being Christian did not come *by* belonging to a certain organization, but was the Holy Spirit in us; still, to say that this means that therefore there is no visible union of those so united is to me a contradiction. It is like the faith-works controversy. Works will not make a sinner innocent again; only God's gift can do that; but God's gift will spill over into works done in the Spirit, as its effect, not its cause.

Secondly, the truth is the truth; and while some people, because of their temperaments or training, cannot accept some of the truth, it does not follow that that which they cannot accept is "false for them" and only "true for those who believe it."

The Christian Creed is not one of values, but one of facts. We do not "believe in" brotherhood, love, justice, and so on; we believe that there is only one God, that Jesus was born from a virgin mother, that he in fact suffered crucifixion and died, and in fact returned to life, and so on. We assert that these are facts, not legends—or, as Paul said, "our faith is a waste of time."

The point here is the belief does not create the facts; the facts are facts irrespective of whether anyone believes them or not. Jesus was in fact crucified and died, even if some Muslims think he wasn't. He in fact came back to life, even if practically all non-Christians (and even some Christians) think he didn't.

But what did actually happen? Is the piece of bread the words "This is my body" are said over actually Jesus' *body*, or is this not a fact, but a pious way of looking at things? What is the truth—the fact—here? Obviously, many Christians believe one side, and many others the opposite.

We are pretty far away from the events themselves. There are no longer any of the five hundred who saw him still alive for us to question. If Jesus is serious about "the facts" being what saves us,

then it would seem that there would have to be something by which what the facts are could be preserved.

Protestants, of course, immediately say that there is: the New Testament. But which books are really the New Testament? There are Gospels like the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of the Childhood of Jesus, and other books like the Books of Esdras and so on which have equal antiquity as manuscripts with what we are familiar with, but which have never been accepted as authentic. Who is to say, in other words, which Books are the Bible? All recount fantastic events, so to distinguish the “true” ones from the “legendary” ones on the basis of internal evidence is impossible; you wind up rejecting them all, as so many Biblical scholars have done, and save only that core which you think is “reasonable to believe.”

No, I think the Church—the sociological entity, now—must exist mainly to let us know what are the facts.

Now in one sense, what the facts actually are doesn't make a great deal of difference toward a person's salvation. We will all be saved, as I said much earlier, by our mistakes; none of our ideas of what the facts are exactly squares with what they are; and God uses our ignorance and perversity and pig-headedness to save us.

Some might, in the real world, be damned if they belonged to the Catholic Church, because the Church makes them hold as facts things they simply cannot bring themselves to believe are facts. So God in his wisdom has created Churches that they can belong to, where they can hold to part of the truth and reach their salvation that way. In this sense, what does it matter?

Still, the truth is the truth; the facts are the facts; what happened did happen. And it is *by* our belief that it happened that we accept the life of God, and are released from our sins and will share God's happiness. So it *does* matter that the truth be there to be known by those who can know it, to the extent that they can know it. If for some reason we can't believe some aspect of the facts, God uses this for our benefit; but it does not detract from the value that the facts

should be there and that we should be in a position of knowing them if we can.

That is, I would think that a person who knew or believed (as I do) that the Catholic Church held as facts the total of the facts that are there to be believed (even if no one in the Church *understands* all about these facts—but that is another story), and deliberately *refused* to belong to it because he didn't like some particular tenet, or didn't like the people in it (thinking that Bishops lived luxurious lives, for instance), then that person would be putting his salvation in danger.

The Church does not exist, in other words, to provide us with models of holiness, though there undoubtedly should be many such models in it; it exists, first, so that the unified life of the Mystical Body should have a visible expression, and secondly, so that the facts will be available to be known as facts and not legends. If all the Bishops in the world were lechers, including the Pope, this would still not be an argument against the Church or the truth of Christianity.

Now what does all this mean for the layman? What it means is that he recognizes that his belonging to the Body of the Prince comes from the Prince's gift to him; and this is what is essential.

But he belongs to the sociological entity called the Church (and if he knows what he is doing, I think to the Catholic Church), because he cannot accept that he will be united with the other cells of that same body in a purely spiritual way with no visible sign of it; his belonging to the Body would not separate him from the other cells, but make him seek them out.

He also knows that what he thinks he believes may be the result of inspiration by the Holy Spirit or by his own fevered intellect, or even by the evil spirit; and he wants some way he can check to see which way the Holy Spirit is leading him. The Holy Spirit will not contradict himself; so if he believes as true something the Church teaches is false, then he knows it is his belief that doesn't square with the facts.

That is, he is, as I said, not like the Religious, who finds the will of God in what the superior commands. The layman finds the will of

God in what seems to him to be the correct and reasonable thing to do under the circumstances, looking on the world (as he thinks) from Jesus' divine-human point of view. The Church functions for him as a kind of veto: when he wants to do something that the Bishop forbids, then God did not want him to do it. When he says something that the Bishop silences, then God did not want it said by him in this way at this time. He is not unwilling to submit to this constraint, because he knows that it is not God's will that the good be done at all costs, but that we submit as He submitted—that we fail as he failed—and in that failure that our resurrected selves succeed.

He is the receiver from the Church as an organization: the student that the hierarchy and priests are teaching, and who is being taught directly by the Holy Spirit also. The function of the Church as a society—i.e. the hierarchy—is to see to it that the laymen (the students) have the facts available to them, and that they can worship as a visible unity, not simply individually. The Church as a *community* includes the laity; as a society (i.e. as that part of the community which can issue orders and threaten punishments), it is the hierarchy.

The layman, thus, is free. The “orders” the Church gives are *information*, telling him what the facts are to be believed, and what the Holy Spirit does or doesn't want done; what the Church “orders” him to do is simply a way he “forms his conscience” (that is, find out the facts about what is right and wrong). And if, for instance, like—we can presume—Luther, he cannot believe that these facts are facts or these orders come from the Holy Spirit, then he is “anathema,” which means, “not a member of the visible community,” (that is, he is ex-communicated)—which does not mean he is damned, but simply that what he is teaching is objectively not the truth, or what he is doing is objectively not what the Holy Spirit is prompting—that he is either perverse or objectively mistaken. The excommunication does nothing, really, to *him*, but simply provides information to *others* that what he is saying is not to be believed as the facts.

So in that sense, the Church's commands to the layman are not

commands, and the layman has the full freedom of the Christian, unlike either the clergy or the Religious, for whom the will of God consists in taking orders. For the clergy and the Religious, the orders of superiors are orders from God, not simply information.

I spoke of the Religious; the priest is taking orders on *what to teach and how to do it, on how to help the people to worship as a unit* from his Bishop; and the Bishop is taking the orders from the Deposit of Faith: that is, from the College of Bishops, whose spokesman is the Pope. The Bishop is not taking orders from the Pope, but from the Prince Himself, as commanded to his Representatives (“Apostoloi”) from the beginning through the living tradition. These are real orders; this is why he is the Prince’s Representative in our time.

I said much much earlier that the Bishop has no mind of his own; he is a pure channel by which the authentic facts about Jesus and his teaching get transmitted to the people of today. He has no control over what is to be taught, and very little over how it is to be taught. If ever there was an “instrument,” it is the Bishop—and by delegation, the priest who is his instrument.

The Theologian’s job is to ponder the meaning of the facts and the teaching of Jesus; to show how it is true, in spite of apparent evidence (from science, for instance) to the contrary; and to show how it is “relevant” to our age, so different from the age of Jesus. This is the Theologian’s task, and is something that I, a layman, am trying to do in these pages. The Bishop’s task, and the priest’s, is to *see to it that the facts are preserved*, and that the “meaning and relevance” doesn’t mask what the facts are or take their place.

In this connection, I think for a priest to teach something that (as a Theologian, say) he finds at variance with the common teaching of the Church is for that priest to do a tremendous disservice to what the Church as a society is all about; to my mind, he is directly contradicting his *teaching* function as a priest—and is teaching what *he* thinks is “true,” rather than transmitting what the *Church* teaches as the facts. How can the layman use what the clergy teaches as a

check on his own belief if all he is checking it against is what the priest happens to be thinking? The “teaching” of the Church is not then what the facts *actually are*, but simply what “the learned” happen to think based on the evidence they have at the moment; and if the particular Theologian is as learned as Isaac Newton was in physics, his knowledge is of the same order as Newton’s—able to be overthrown in fundamental respects by someone who unearths some new evidence. If the teaching of the Church is of this order, then the whole enterprise *is* a waste of time, because no one now is going to get back there and find out whether Jesus actually did walk on water and all the rest of it.

So when a thinker who is a member of the clergy “finds out” something that seems to contradict what the Church is saying, let him discuss it with other members of the clergy and check things out, so that the Church can speak with one voice—or let him shut up.

I realize that I have in a sense excluded myself from this; because as a layman, I don’t belong to that part of the Christian community whose function is preservation of the facts; and so my meanderings into what the “meaning and relevance” of being a layman is are mine and are recognized as mine, not as what the Church teaches.

I am not totally free, however. If there is anything in these pages that is *contrary* to the teaching of the Church, I would hope that what is contrary would be suppressed by the hierarchy. Of course, I hope that only that part that is contrary to Church teaching would be suppressed, and the rest, if it is not positively false, would be allowed to be stated. But if none of this can be published, then so be it; I would then hope that, if it is true, and the Holy Spirit does not want it known now, then it would be preserved somewhere so that when the opportune time comes when people would not misunderstand it, it can then see the light, and people can be helped by it.

My task, as I see it, is to get the words down on paper, so that they are available to those (if any) who can benefit from them. The words seem to me to be odd enough so that if I don’t say them, they won’t

be said; and I do think that they are true and worth saying. But once I have done this, my essential service to mankind has been accomplished; and if nothing ever comes of it—well, I did what I could, and it is better that the effort come to nothing than that falsehood masquerade as the truth.

One word on the worship of the People of God. The essential task of God's People, the Body of the Prince, is to perform the sacrifice two thousand years ago which redeems us here and now. I have less patience than I should with those who don't go to Mass because they "get nothing out of it." Jesus got nothing out of the crucifixion, and the Mass *is* the crucifixion, in which we, the laity participate. Our participation is made possible by the clergyman—the priest—but it is we, Jesus living in the world today, who perform the "People's Work" (leitourgia—liturgy), and are the many of the sacrifice of one man two thousand years ago—now.

I have said this before. What I want to stress at the moment is that the *participation* here is the participation in the *crucifixion*, not the participation in the *ceremony*. There is nothing wrong with participating in the ceremony; but *being passive at the ceremony can be active participation in the crucifixion*, which is what it is all about.

That is, one who is aware that he is a cell in the body of the man who is now two thousand years ago being crucified for the redemption of the world from sin and who is simply "following" the Mass with this in mind, and not, perhaps, even saying the responses with the rest—is he participating *less* than the person who is up there in the choir loft, singing on key and in perfect time, shaking hands with the proper smile and "communing" (in the ordinary sense) with all the other members of the human race?

The Mass is not a solidarity session of human togetherness; if that happens, it is *because of* what the Mass is, but it is not *what* the Mass is; the crucifixion unites us; but it is the crucifixion that is what the Mass is, not "unity."

And what the *raison d'être* of the Mass as a ceremony is is to make

the people aware of what they are doing; to make them participate in the crucifixion. What leads to this is beneficial in the Mass; what distracts from it is to be eschewed, no matter how much “togetherness and fellow-feeling” it may foster. If we leave the Church building with the impression that we like belonging to that club, the Mass we attended has missed the point. We are supposed to have been redeeming the present age by presenting it with the crucifixion in us.

Again, there are volumes to be written on each of the topics in this too-long, too-short chapter. But I fall back on the prefatory nature of what this book is supposed to be, and hide my inadequacy there.

There remains now only for me to say something about how I think the layman could be trained to get something of an adequate idea of what living a real Christian life could be in practice. That is the next and final chapter.

Chapter 8

The Training of the Layman

The trouble with a book of this sort, which attempts in so short a scope to apply Christianity to the lay life, is that it provokes the reaction, “Yes, but how do you apply the application?” Any person trying to use this as a kind of textbook or lab manual for Christianity will soon discover that what might be taken to be applications are still generalities—though of a lower order than that Christianity is having the attitude of Jesus—and will need considerable adjustment to fit into any real person’s actual condition. But the problem here is that the adjustment, to be successful, must not adjust away the general truth being applied, and it is not always perfectly clear how you manage this juggling act.

This is why I think that the Christian layman who wants to live a deeply dedicated life that is consistent with his Christianity—the one who wants to be a real lay saint—needs much more than a book, a *cursillo*, or a summer course in Christian living. In fact, on the premise that a little learning is a dangerous thing, such superficial treatments of the subject—what you have almost got through reading—can do more harm than good, because you, the victim, leave them with the idea that you now know what you are doing. You would be like a student I was once encouraging to major in psychology. “Oh, I had that in high school,” he said.

I realize that this means that I shouldn’t have written this book. But I look on it as a rather extended plea for specialized training in Christianity for laymen, analogous to seminaries for the clergy and

novitiates and training periods for Religious. If the lay state is qualitatively different from these two states (and that is what the book is about, really), then it is no less complex, and those who embark on it should have some way they can learn how to steer the vessel.

Intellectual training

I think that what really makes the difference between a layman who is seriously trying for sanctity and a wild fanatic is that the layman will know about himself, about the world, and about his faith as they objectively are, and will tailor what he does to a respect for reality in all of its complexity.

In the last analysis, fervor is fairly easy to drum up; orators create it for an hour or so, and retreats and *cursillos* sometimes have lasting effects on the emotional orientation of those who take part in them.

But fervor without knowledge is fire without a fireplace; it burns, but can burn down, and the heat dissipates into the air. It does some good, and is not to be sneered at; but stoves are better. The trouble is that knowledge is tedious to acquire, and the fervent, who want to get out and *do* something, can't be bothered with it.

But Christianity is essentially knowledge, not action; what you *do* is look on things differently; and so knowledge deserves first place in Christian lay training.

And if the layman is to acquire the objective knowledge of his faith and of the world which he needs to act intelligently, it follows that he will have to have a good deal of Theology and philosophy. Philosophy, while it is at it, will give him knowledge also of who and what he is, because one of the basic questions of philosophy is "What does it mean to be a human being?"

This should not be taken to imply, however, that the layman has to become a Theologian or a philosopher. In a sense, he is to Christian theorists what the engineer is to the scientist. We can see from the instruction of engineers that, though they do take some

courses which are the same as courses training theoretical scientists, many of their courses are special, dealing with the applications much more than the theory. They have to know enough of the theory so that they can apply it; but they do not have to know all the ins and outs of it, only what it means.

Presumably, then, Theology courses for the layman would involve theory, but not the same approach to theory that would be taken for one who wanted to make Theology his career. For instance, in discussing the priesthood of the laity, the layman's instruction would go into the background of the question enough so that he knew what it meant, but not necessarily so much that he could give a thorough justification of the concept; and the course would orient itself toward the sense in which the layman shares the priestly function while being lay, and how this function is to reveal itself concretely in his lay life. You can't do this with a fuzzy-headed notion of what the priesthood of all believers is, or you get reading the Lessons at Mass as your sharing in this priesthood, instead of what it really entails.

But where do you find such courses? Ah, that is the question. Most of the training of Theologians, who would teach them, is in Theology as applied to the priestly life; and it is not surprising to find that teachers of Theology in our colleges are interested either in pure speculative Theology or in something like the social or economic (or sexual) doctrine of the Church, which is not what I am talking about at all.

Nevertheless, what I am talking about here is what ought to be, not where you can find it. Train some Theologians in the Theological implications of the every-day life of the layman, and then you will have teachers who can teach the courses laymen need.

The same sort of thing applies to philosophy. Discussing the question of immortality to see whether there is evidence for it is one thing; discussing what the evidence means about what our life hereafter must be like, and what that means for our life before hereafter, is something else again. For instance, if the reward for being

“good” is becoming just what you chose to be and no more, then you had better choose here to be what you’d like to be, because God isn’t going to give it to you otherwise, no matter how moral you’ve been. The layman needs philosophy, but not as a philosopher; he needs to know what philosophy implies about what he does in his lay life.

With that said, I would think that any serious training in these subjects would have to happen on the college level; and this sounds as if what I am saying is that we should rethink our offerings in philosophy and Theology in our Catholic colleges and universities.

But really, teaching what a person not particularly interested in sanctity needs to know not to make a mess of his life is different from what a potential lay saint needs to know. And colleges and universities cannot assume that everyone who comes into them is like a Thérèse of Lisieux, longing for sanctity and full of love of Jesus. Christianity is also for the mediocre, and to give such people the meat of saints is to make them choke. Ask them to take 30 semester-hours of philosophy and 30 of Theology and, even if you could make them do it, they’d resent it so much that they’d get nothing out of it.

Should there be, then, a special seminary for laymen? I think not. Most of a layman’s life will be in the context of his career, and what he *does* as an accountant or an artist or a physicist will be just what any accountant or whatever does. Why create a whole school which would, for just a few people, duplicate the resources of a university?

No, what I think makes most sense is a special program *within* a college or university for those who want to make their lay lives into saintly lay lives, and who want to integrate Christianity into every phase of their lives in a very detailed and profound way.

What I would envision is a program which would need five years instead of four in order to acquire a Bachelor’s degree in the major of the student’s choice. Each semester, there would be a course in philosophy and one in Theology, dealing with some phase of life: the philosophy of nature, say, to see how we fit into the world, and during the same semester, the Theology of the material world, and how it is

“groaning” for its redemption, as Paul says; the philosophy of human nature, to see what we are basically like, and in that semester the Theology of grace, to see how we are transformed; the philosophy of society, the social teaching of the Church—and so on. In ten semesters, you could touch on quite a few aspects of life, and the student presumably would also during the semester on nature studies, be studying his science requirements, and during the social-philosophy-social-Theology semester, would be taking his college’s social science requirements also, so that he would see the same topic from many points of view. The object of the philosophy and Theology courses would be to help him see how Christianity can transform the particular aspect of his life that the semester deals with.

Meanwhile, there ought to be discussions among the members of this program about just how they see things fitting together, and how Christianity is to transform their attitude toward their major career choice; so in addition to the courses, I would envision seminars or talk-sessions once every couple of weeks, under the supervision of whoever is brave enough to undertake the management of such a program.

Training in prayer

Now a Christian needs not only to know, but to pray. Then room must be made in the program for teaching the budding lay saint how to pray in a way that will be most helpful for him.

Obviously, if the liturgy is the “people’s work,” then the students would be expected to attend Mass—I would think together—every day. Whether this would be the college’s regular mass for the students, or whether there would be a special one for them, I don’t have any definite idea on. Perhaps the latter, so that the homily could be more definitely directed and at a higher Theological level than the chats which are needed for the usual congregation.

The idea here is not to create a little Religious congregation, but

that while the students are in training, help and the reinforcement of doing what others are doing while they are doing it is necessary. You have to have someone hold you while you take your first steps; then after you've learned to walk, you don't need the hands ready to steady you when you totter.

So yes, for the trainees there should be regulations and expectations for them, so that *afterwards* they can carry on on their own. When forming habits, you need all the help you can get; once they are formed (and five years could do the job), the habit itself is a help, and you don't need external prodding. We *are* fallen, remember, no matter how fervent we are.

I would also think that personal prayer, private meditation, would also be required: say a half hour every day. I am not talking about "transcendental meditation," however great its value, but Christian mental prayer, but of a lay sort. Thinking about the life of Jesus, to be sure; but also things like concentrating on individual daily actions and pondering how they can be Christianized by taking a new attitude toward them.

For instance, spend a half hour in the presence of your Master considering what the difference is in getting up in a Christian way as opposed to just getting up. What *is* getting up in the morning? What are you doing? How can it be most fully what it really is? How can God's infinite respect for sleep and waking make it more itself? Or consider washing your face. How do you Christianly wash your face?

All of this sounds silly when you say it; a half hour spent prayerfully pondering washing your face? But it doesn't follow that it is meaningless, and, as St. Thérèse of Lisieux showed, this transformation of little things amounts to a transformation of everything, because it transforms your whole outlook on anything—which is what Christianity's *metanoia* is.

I would like to see the person who would like to enter this program make a full Ignatian month-long retreat, alone, with just the spiritual director seeing him. After all, the Ignatian retreat is

concerned with what your life is to be, seeing it in the light of the Master. I have some problems with Ignatius's philosophy (in the First Week especially), and I think the content of the meditations would have to be adapted from their rather propagandistic orientation toward an active Religious life into a more neutral direction. But the idea is sound and is an excellent start on a new outlook—and it certainly teaches you how to meditate.

There should, I think, be eight-day retreats every year of the five after this, where a person could rethink his goals in life in the light of what he learned that year. I think three days is too little to get anything really profound done; and we are talking about really profound training. Should retreats continue after graduation? I don't know, and I think that is up to the graduate himself. The layman is on his own.

Ascetical training

What of the layman's asceticism? Should he have hair shirts and the rest of it? Ascetical training is exercises whose function is to get our attention off ourselves and our own importance; and while at certain times and for certain people hair shirts and little whips may have helped (and I suppose can help for a given layman now), something should be devised that would help the lay saint get out of his preoccupation with himself.

I would suppose that this would mainly consist in helping others: the other members of the group, and those in the college—and the poor of the area, and those needing to be helped. The point, I would think, is to get over the annoyance at being asked favors and at having to drop what you are doing to do something that someone else wants done. That is the main ascetical training we need. Why are our own interests that vital? What difference does what I am doing make?

In my view, sufficient ascetical training for the layman has two main phases. The first consists of willingly and cheerfully doing the

disagreeable chores that need to be done. God knows, there will be enough opportunities later in marriage and with a family and in the workplace to continue this sort of thing; what is necessary during training is to take the right attitude toward it, so that the tasks are not seen as disagreeable (because we would rather be doing something else that to us is important) but something that is just as significant as what we would otherwise be doing.

The other phase of lay asceticism would consist in not simply putting up with other people and their quirks, but in being with them in situations in which they are accepted as what they are, without any value judgments made upon them at all. That is, their “disagreeable traits” are not really to be *tolerated*, but to be recognized as not disagreeable. They are only disagreeable, after all, for one who is inconvenienced by them: for one who resents the tone of voice, or considers that the demands made cut into the “importance” of his time, or whose standards of beauty make the other person unpleasant to look at—or to smell. You can only be put off by another person if you consider yourself and your own ways more important.

I don’t know how you would go about inculcating this attitude, which I think, nonetheless, is vital not only for a Christian, but for any human being who wants to interact with others. It is, of course, the spiritual equivalent of turning the other cheek when slapped and giving the shirt when the other rudely demands your coat. Who are you to resent the other person?

I suspect that once a trainee has caught what the basic idea is, that the other’s disagreeableness is actually a reflection of one’s own idea of self-importance, there will be five hundred occasions every day to practice this virtue, which is, of course, humility. Unfortunately, the basic idea is not very often understood, and we have countless examples of those horrible “Christians” who “put up” with everything and “tolerate” others and so on: who make a virtue of “not noticing” evils in others—when it is quite evident that they *see* the evils, and see them *as* evil, and so have missed the whole point.

...Well, I have said about a tenth of what I set out to say, and perhaps a hundredth of what I would like to have said if I had the knowledge and skill to say it; and a ten-thousandth of what ought to be said. But this is a preface, no more; the book has yet to be written. But the book of which this is a preface is the book written in the “fleshy tablets of the heart,” and I hope it will take hundreds of years to complete. May this preface provide a start to its writing.