

Editorial

“MAN COME OF AGE”

IT IS EXHILARATING to picture ourselves as men and women of a new aeon—not just one more century in a long series, but the “New Age” of the “New Man.” It is exhilarating to work at tearing down the old structures of man’s self-understanding—his metaphysics, his theology—in response to the revolutionary change in his mode of existence. It is exhilarating to think of the “New Man” as master of his fate and of himself, able not only to solve any problems that are in principle soluble but also to refrain from concocting unverifiable answers to unanswerable questions. But are all these exhilarating thoughts and imaginings rational? Do they correspond to the realities of the human situation? Can our exhilaration survive the chilly dawn of self-criticism?

The Christian theologian of the classical tradition, however much he may wonder at the spectacle of so many of his colleagues drinking deep draughts of the heady wine labelled “Man Come of Age,” certainly cannot take it for granted that the right answer to these questions is “No, No, No!” Altogether too much is at stake. No committed servant of the Christian mission can be anything but deeply concerned to understand the race to which the Christian message must be spoken. If man has truly taken a giant step forward—the step from childhood to mature manhood—the thoughtful Christian will want to learn all about it. If man has changed so radically that the Christian message, as traditionally conceived, is no longer meaningful to him, the emergence of the “New Man” obviously poses a critical problem for Christian teachers—indeed, for every Christian believer. Christians must not shut their eyes to the possibility that the historic Christian faith will have to be dismissed as a means of seeing how things really are—that it is a fairy-tale appropriate to man’s past infancy, not a vision of truth for mature men who must manage their own affairs in the real world.

But has man’s situation in fact changed all that much? Have men at long last become “as gods, knowing good and evil”? The answer may not be as simple as the salesmen of new wine tend to assume.

It is futile to call into question what Kenneth Cragg has called “the unprecedented degree of man’s competence” (*Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, January, 1966, p. 107). Man’s physical reach is longer than it has ever been. His inventive mind can take possession of his world, exploit and transport its resources, meet the challenge of natural disaster and the threat of disease—all to a degree unimagined by earlier generations. That same mind can probe the depths of human emotion and analyse the intricacies of human relationships with a skill that enables man to handle himself and

organize his society with greater sophistication and efficiency than ever before. In sum, man can cope with the problems of his environment and his personality with unprecedented artfulness. If it would be an exaggeration to claim that he had ever been completely passive and helpless in the face of his urgent practical problems, it would be dishonest to ignore the fact that modern scientific techniques have radically altered the balance of power between human purposes and the material, human as well as non-human, that man seeks to shape. If historic Christianity is essentially a program for solving human problems by handing them over to a supernatural problem-solver, then the "god" of Christian faith is well on the way to replacement by the man-god who assuages his own griefs and comforts his own sorrows. At best, "god" may survive for a little while as a consoling fantasy for those whose problems cannot yet be solved by human technology and a sustaining illusion for those who are still too immature to accept the natural limits of human life.

But what if man is potentially greater and actually more miserable than the prophets of the "New Age" have realized? What if human dissatisfaction with human limitations is a witness to man's calling to communion with transcendent Mystery? What if man's existential questions call for more than scientific answers? What if technology is an opiate rather than a cure for what really ails man? What if man is not just hungry and thirsty, wanting food and drink; not just diseased, seeking a sure cure for syphilis and cancer; not just neurotic, needing to improve his psychic efficiency? What if man is really God's lost child—a finite being, receptive to infinite Wisdom and Love, yet alienated from him; a mortal being, called to share in God's eternal life, yet choosing death? What price "Man Come of Age," if he can solve every problem but cannot even begin to penetrate the mystery of his existence? Kenneth Cragg's words sound as a warning bell: "Technology must be allowed to enlarge, not evaporate, wonder; to deepen, not terminate, worship."

"Man Come of Age" is unprecedentedly competent in doing what he decides to do, but are his decisions incomparably wise and fair? American "Man Come of Age" solves hypothetical future problems by incinerating Vietnamese peasants now; his technique is masterful, but can we compliment him on his moral sensitivity in applying it? Brazilian "Man Come of Age" feeds sugar-coated arsenic to Indian tribesmen to remove an obstacle to mineral exploitation; does his sense of human worth match his practical ingenuity? Canadian "Woman Come of Age" destroys unborn life because another baby might make her nervous or disrupt her social program; can we credit her with what we rightly take to be an index of moral maturity, respect for human life? Now as always, the human scene gives us some reason to think that man may be very clever but is not *ipso facto* very good—that he may have gone a long way towards mastering his world and his psyche but still desperately needs to be mastered by his Creator and Redeemer, whose purpose alone can "order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men."

"Man Come of Age" is adept at solving the technical problems of human action but inept at penetrating the mystery of human existence. To do the latter he must be ready to listen, because the mystery of man is hidden in the purpose of man's Creator, who alone can disclose it. But surely such a disclosure is just what historic Christianity is essentially about. A church that knows its own business need not fear that "Man Come of Age," whatever his pretensions, will cease to need its message.

E.R.F.

ANNUAL MEETING

THE ANNUAL MEETING of the *Canadian Journal of Theology* will be held at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, on Wednesday, May 18, 1966, at 4 p.m. All subscribers and friends are welcome.

NORMAN E. WAGNER
Secretary