

‘ IN THE WORLD AND NOT OF THE WORLD ’

explanation of sin, and in face of the difficulties, we may prefer to retain our modern use of the term ‘ sin. ’ But we have no choice with regard to the substance of the Biblical teaching which lies behind the Bible’s use of this word, and in point of fact we actually retain the term in its Biblical sense in the expression ‘ original sin. ’ It is here where our definition of sin proves so inadequate that we have difficulty in showing how ‘ original sin ’ is sin. We would not refer to the sickness of the child as sin, but we must regard it as a manifestation or an effect of original sin. Every evil in Biblical thought comes within that all-embracing term sin, not excluding the evils to be found in material creation, since it too awaits its redemption (Rom. 8:19ff.). The taking away of sin, therefore (or, as we would say, the forgiveness, or remission of sin) means, finally at least, the taking away of all evil. A sharp division between spiritual good and material good is as alien to the thought of the Bible as is a sharp division between spiritual evil and physical evil. To make such a division is to obscure the full import of the messianic hope,<sup>1</sup> and Our Lord’s fulfilment of it.

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THE WORLD ’<sup>2</sup>

(Translated from the French by B. Dickinson)

We find little in St Paul about the sanctification of a Christian who has interests in the world. St Paul more readily thinks of him, it would seem, as disinterested in the world. Is this because of a kind of indifference—without hostility, however—towards the world ‘ whose form is passing away ’ (1 Cor. 7:31), an indifference to its culture, to its present fate? It seems that St Paul, just like Our Lord in the Gospel, without feeling hostile towards this life, was really interested only in the next. . . .

Yet we find in St Paul a few pronouncements which apply to our problem. These are the texts :

I mean, brethren, the appointed time has grown very short : from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world

<sup>1</sup> The language in which the prophets expressed the blessings to come has too readily been taken as mere metaphor, and the messianic hope of Israel rather too glibly labelled as materialistic. There are signs that this kind of judgment is now being modified to some extent, cf. J. van der Ploeg, *Revue Biblique* (1954), pp. 497ff. Pinckaers : ‘ L’Espérance de l’A.T. est-elle la même que la nôtre ? ’ *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, LXXVII, pp. 785-99.

<sup>2</sup> cf. John 17:9-19

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as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away. (1 Cor. 7:29-31)

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. (2 Cor. 4:7-11)

. . . as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labours, watching, hunger; by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything. (2 Cor. 6:4-10)

For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor. 12:10)

It is noteworthy that these texts are ‘ dialectic,’ that is to say they utter in the same breath a *yes* and *no* about the same thing. This contradiction we ourselves summed up in the formula, ‘ In the world and not of the world.’

*In the world and not of the world.* Theoretically, such expressions exactly meet the case of a Christian layman who wants to take his Christianity seriously—his vocation to eternal life and his call to be a saint—together with his assignment to the work of this world, which seems to determine clearly, in a definite way, his state as a layman. As a Christian, he must be native to heaven, where dwells the Lord to whom he has dedicated his life and handed over, so to speak, all the keys of his house. That removes him from worldly ways of living: St Paul tells us that, in Christ, there is no longer either man or woman, either slave or free, either Greek or barbarian, meaning that this world's ways of living have been completely left behind (cf. Gal. 3:27-8; Col. 3:4). We belong to a new unity and a new reality, the Body of Christ, that is nourished from a source which is new and entirely from on high, the Spirit of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). It is no longer the life of a man or a woman, employer or employee, Englishman or German that I have to live, but the life of *Christ*, a life ‘ hidden with Christ in God’ (Col. 3:3). Being still in the flesh, I live, but it is no longer I, it is Christ who lives in me his risen life (Gal. 2:20).

All the same, I live; I am still in the flesh, man or woman, employer

or employee, Englishman or German and, as such, I have to work out my salvation, to sanctify myself, to glorify God. It is not a man in the abstract, it is a man in a certain 'situation' who must sing the glory of God. The lay state allows precisely the exercise of those activities by which the passing world endures and is built up, and a grasp of all those threads of which the specific stuff of this world is woven: family, profession, the State. The priest or religious may well merely lend themselves to all that, looking upon it simply as a spiritual training or as an occasion for charity. This the layman cannot do; he is obliged to give himself up to it. He can no more be indifferent to the world than he is undifferentiated in the world.

The contradictions expressed by St Paul in the texts we have quoted seem to us to formulate fairly closely the crucial paradoxes of the holiness required from the Christian who is committed to the world. He is bound to keep faith at one and the same time with the two systems of thought and the two loyalties that we have styled: in the world and not of the world. But these Pauline formulae might well be, with all the 'high-toned smartness' commonly assumed by paradoxes, either literary figures of speech (!) or deliberately enigmatic utterances. Now our St Paul certainly had in mind something at once very simple, very profound and very practical (which does not mean: easy). He was offering a word of life, for our life at its most concrete. Let us try, humbly, to understand the meaning of these texts. What is the *reality* that lies hidden beneath these formulae—a reality at once simple, workaday and sublime, like that of the Gospel?

*Dying to the world.* By faith and by the life of faith, built up as it is through living contact with Our Lord in the communion of the Church, the Christian is truly withdrawn from the world, dead to the world. He is crucified with Christ to the life of the flesh, that is to say to the life of nature, or, as Ignatius of Antioch expressed it, to all that is *Eros*, to all that is here below (Rom. 8:2). We are born by another birth, not of the flesh or of the will of man, but of the Spirit. It is this which gives the innermost meaning, if we examine them closely, to virginity, fasting and that kind of logic, so well set forth by Dom Morin, Dom J. Leclercq and Père L. Bouyer, according to which the religious life (monastic life) is simply Christian life taken completely in earnest. You have only to remember St Francis of Assisi. . . .

There is thus, in all genuine Christian life, a kind of radical devaluation and escape from the love of things of this world, wife or husband, money, health, bodily strength and beauty, power or reputation, reasoning and making provision, friends, and even culture. There is no Christianity, no sanctity, without dying to all that. That

is why, when we read any life of a Saint, we always come upon men who forsake their family, treat their body as an enemy, despise money and all human glory—in a word, consider this world as refuse (Phil. 3:8). Doubtless we must make allowance for some rhetorical distortion, often found in 'Lives of Saints,' but while granting also perhaps other modifications, all that is to be found literally in the Gospel and in St Paul.

*The world, duty and vocation.* However, in a second order of time, which corresponds with the other term of the antithesis, all that is given back to us: wife and children, and eventually strength and beauty, wealth and power, our body itself with its joy and loveliness, yes, all that is given back. And along with all that, is restored the world and all that goes with the thrilling adventure of man in the world of men: action, exploration, discoveries, technical mastery, politics, progress. . . . But, just as, in the first order of time, we are dead to all that, we no longer know it according to the flesh; so all that is given back to us, not from below and carnally, not, that is to say, for our enjoyment in the world's eyes or our own—as in fact it is given us in our first birth, according to the flesh—but from on high, as a duty and a grace. For every duty, every mission, implies a task to which the corresponding means (graces) are allotted.

All that is given back to us as a vocation from God, a mission to carry out in His name and in His sight, according to His wishes. This means working for the intentions of love, salvation, communion and eternal life which God seeks in His creation.

Yes, I receive a wife again—but 'in the Lord': 1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 11:11; Eph. 5:21; Col. 3:18; strength and wealth again—but to use in the service of the Lord, who wills that all our 'having' should be useful for *everyone*, as being part of his paternal inheritance, should give joy to all his family, that is to say, to all men. I shall have children—but, again, 'in the Lord': Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20; perhaps servants or subordinates, always 'in the Lord': Eph. 6:5 seq.; Phil. 16:20. There will once more be beauty for my eyes and sweetness for my heart—but received from God as a gift, and therefore accepted with thanksgiving and directed to serve Him in everything that constitutes His will for the world and for me. . . .

In this way the necessary detachment that we live in from the first moment is not indifference: for the world is given back to us, by the will of God, as a duty and a vocation.

*A double and difficult loyalty.* Such is the way in which, at one and the same time, one both has and has not. Such is the way of having a wife as though one had none, or, equally well, of having children, health, intelligence, money, friends, power, etc. . . . St

Augustine collates the first text we quoted above (1 Cor. 7:29-31 : ' . . . let those who have wives live as though they had none, etc. . . . ') with this text from the eschatological discourse : ' Woe to the women who are with child or who give suck in that day ' (Mark 13:17), and he interprets it in this way : Woe to the Christian who is found by his Lord attached to earthly occupations.

The secret of ' using as though you used it not ' is to use with detachment. And the secret of using with detachment is to refer everything back to God. Was it not in this way that our Lord ' had ' all things, having them *as the Son*, that is, as received from his Father and as due to be returned to his Father? Here we might examine those passages in the Gospel, particularly in St John, in which the filial soul of Jesus finds voice : ' My teaching is not *my* teaching, but that of the Father, who sent me ' (John 7:16). . . . Was it not in this way that Abraham, our father, ' had ' his son Isaac? In the first instance, it was in the unlikely circumstances of his conception, and, a second time, after consenting to sacrifice him and having received him back again, by God's mercy (Gen. 22). Since he had consented to sacrifice him, and his son had been given back to him from on high, he no longer possessed him in carnal fashion, but entirely from God and for God, according to the promise and according to grace. And yet he possessed him in a real and truly human sense. In a word, he now possessed him in a way that was entirely different, a way that obliged him to ' give thanks ' to God.

These things are difficult perhaps. They are so profound ! It is well worth the trouble of reflecting on them very carefully : not just once and for all, by the mental gymnastics of a moment, but throughout the course of life, by feeding our meditation from our own life, just as we should feed our life from our meditation. This is the necessary requisite for all thought, if it is to be profound and fruitful. It demands also mutual discussion, in the intimacy between husband and wife, between friends, among Christian communities. In this way we can benefit from that mutual enrichment which is one of the greatest blessings of a fraternal union founded upon a common quest for God.

*The main lines of lay spirituality.* Here, then, very briefly expressed, are a few points that plot, in the light of these truths, the main lines of a ' spirituality ' or way of holiness for the Christian who is engaged in the world's work.

I First of all, this holiness or spirituality will always be composed of two moments : disconnecting, connecting. These two moments will, in some cases, succeed each other with a fairly clean ' break and make,' and in that order, through the whole course of a lifetime, as

we can see it happening in the lives of many saints. But more often these two moments will shuttle continually to and fro in our span of life, together weaving, like the warp and the web, the real stuff of our ascent towards God, across the bitternesses and the joys of His service.

2 Next : any plan for sanctifying ourselves in the world presupposes that we should try to understand God’s purposes : in general, for the world, and in particular for ourselves. One of the tasks and, in fact, one of the benefits or one of the achievements of Catholic Action is precisely this. It reveals God’s plan and *our place in the world* to us, and then, in the course of time and through actual problems it gives us a faculty for seeing it : in such a way that we know exactly *what it is* that has been given back to us as our task and vocation, after we have withdrawn by a ‘death to this world,’ and as our responsibility before our Father. Along this same line, a spirituality for a Christian in the world will most of all draw life from a very humble and very loving consecration to the will of God, as we tried to show in Chapter IX of *Jalons Pour Une Théologie du Laïcat* (Planning a Theology for Layfolk). In that lies the beginning and the end, the source and the consummation, of all holiness.

3 Arising from that, in the third place, is the obvious and fundamental necessity of purifying our judgment of things, of our commitments, our joys, of all that is for us a ‘having’ and a possible source of enjoyment : family, money, position, power, health, etc. Above all is the necessity of revising and purifying our idea of ourselves, the idea we have of our own place and importance in the world. Not that all that needs ‘purification,’ on principle, as if it were bad in itself. But we must have all that ‘as if we had it not.’ We must reach the point of having it only from God and for him. The means of attaining this ideal is simple, there is only one : the cross. Ah, what tremendous truth there is in Leon Bloy’s saying : ‘Man’s poor heart has parts which have not yet come to life, and there sorrow enters in to give them existence’ (letter of 25 April 1873 to G. Landry). Such a role must be played in Christian living by purifications, and the difficulties of life can furnish us with the occasion and the means. I have children and I love them : they are handsome, intelligent, etc. Well and good. But for me to have them truly *from God*, I may be asked, if not, like Abraham, to sacrifice their lives, at least to perform some difficult and ‘costing’ act that will apparently oblige me to surrender that very thing which I believed I might lawfully enjoy. I will have to learn to have them, not for myself, but (for them and) for God. It will be the same for my health, my money, perhaps my reputation and my freedom. . . . We must be willing to pass through

a tunnel to ensure that the light that is given us is *from God*, not of the flesh, to ensure that for us it may be a means of serving and an occasion for thanksgiving rather than for carnal enjoyment, however 'honourable.' Here we reach the heart of Christian living. It requires a second birth, and not only that of Baptism, which did not cost us much, but that of a real 'conversion,' that is to say, a radical revaluation of standards in our life. It will not work without the cross, or without those little sacrifices which St Teresa of Lisieux has taught us to understand better. Only if we do not neglect those very little things which precisely keep our will to live, not to ourselves, but to the Lord Jesus, awake and watching (cf. Rom. 6:10-11; 14:18), only then are we seriously training ourselves to enter that way of renunciation, that life through death, which is the way of the Lord Jesus. All that is far too sublime, it's unliveable: 'all right for saints!'

*The daily round.* No. That is, indeed, the way of real holiness—with or without a halo matters little. But this way is simple, and it can become the way of our daily life. It is simple because, as they say in scholastic philosophy, 'that does not add to the number' of our daily caravan of cares, duties or engagements. Fundamentally, what does it amount to? Quite simply to put all that, which we do like other people, in a new light and a new dimension. This light, this dimension, by making us see and take hold of all that as an expression of the will of God, enable us to live, not according to the flesh, and not only according to the world, but 'in the Lord' and for God. This they do from the mainspring of a detachment (the cross) and by virtue of all those spiritual aids which are given to us in the Church, which is the Communion of Saints.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

L. H. Grollenberg, O.P., *Atlas of the Bible*. Tr. and edited by Joyce M. H. Reid and H. H. Rowley. Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, Edinburgh 1956. Size 10½" × 14". pp. 166, maps 35, photographs over 400. 70s.

The significance of the title *Atlas of the Bible* has altered considerably during the past few years. In our school days an atlas was simply a collection of maps; illustrations and photographs of the countries we were studying had to be sought elsewhere, and they were usually all too few. But this magnificent book is first of all the Holy Land in pictures. When I say first of all I am being most unscholarly: