

sick and so pathetically eager for release, has been touched by the healing spirit of Notre Dame—Saint Alban. It will happen, but first of all there is the hard and patient work of preparation. That is true of all parishes everywhere. And that is why Père Chéry's book should be read by everyone who believes—and what Catholic cannot believe?—that the recovery of the Christian life demands, to begin with, an examination of conscience. *Notre Dame—Saint Alban* will help.

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THE REALITY OF FAITH IN THE MODERN WORLD

IN the spring of 1939 I was asked by the editor of *Werktblätter*, one of the leading periodicals of the Catholic youth-movement in Germany, to contribute to the final number which he had been permitted to publish before this periodical had to cease to exist—to save paper, as it was said. We former contributors were asked to state what we felt was the most important duty of young Catholics of our time. Since soon afterwards I left Germany, I did not receive an offprint of that article, but some while ago a friend of mine presented me with an odd copy of that issue. When I read it again, it struck me that, in spite of the world-shaking events which had taken place in the meantime, the fundamental spiritual situation which we then considered had very little changed.

The editor had given my contribution the title 'Die lautere Wirklichkeit', which I may perhaps translate 'Reality, nothing but reality'. I still feel that the fundamental duty of Catholics in our time is to realise for themselves and for others that there are things which, though not belonging to the material and sensuous sphere, are real. It is the general characteristic of our age that its conception of reality is no longer derived from the external but from the internal world. Modern art, for example, does no longer aim at representing grapes so true to life that the birds would come and pick at them, but at representing either the grapeness of grapes or some other realisation of internal reality which, we may say, happened to arise from the sense-picture of grapes. Sometimes, I feel, Catholics are afraid of accepting this internal conception of reality, accepting not in the sense of adopting it, but of giving it credit, of believing that it is sincere, honest and intellectually decent. We are inclined to regard this conception of reality as conducive to false mysticism and to subjectivism.

I have shown elsewhere that while liturgical arts have benefited

from modern art, the liturgy has preserved some of the lasting principles on which modern art is based.¹ There is a similar connection between modern philosophy and the philosophy traditionally associated with Catholicism. While it is neither wise nor correct to allege that the turn made in modern philosophy from epistemology to ontology is a return to the *philosophia perennis*, it is certainly of greatest significance that both modern and Christian philosophy are fundamentally concerned with reality. (The term 'modern philosophy' in this sense is as restricted as the term 'modern art' usually is, namely denoting not any philosophy of our time but that philosophy which is the specific and new expression of it, notably Existential philosophy).

In his poem 'Experience of Death', Rilke gave a concise description of the experience of reality characteristic of this modern philosophy. Through the death of a friend, the poet says, he was led to realising anew the (internal) reality of (external) reality. 'Through the gap through which he went, there fell upon this stage' (modern man feels that the major part of his life consists in acting in a mask on a stage, where he pretends to be something which in reality he is not) 'a ray from that reality' (that real one) so that there appeared to him 'green of real greenness, real sunshine, real trees'. If we doubt whether this fundamental idea of 'modern' art and philosophy is just an affectation or a vital reality, we should study the amazing synonymy of expressions by which this experience has been described by authors from many different countries, independent of each other, as transparence (Jaspers), epiphany (Joyce), or lucidity (Gide). External reality as such is flat, blunt, grey, jelly-ish, but it can become in itself, or the bearer of, internal reality, deep, sharp, transparent, lucid, crisp and palpable. Experience of such (internal) realisation is the greatest, perhaps the only source, of values to modern man. The principal fields where such reality is encountered are contact with fellow-men (love), with real things (work) and with the border-situations of life (suffering and death). Where contact with reality is merely external, as in technical (and scientific) success or physical attainments and achievements, it usually remains blunt and opaque.

From his realisation of reality, in a few sacred moments of his life, modern man takes his new standards, which replace the traditional standards of conduct (good and bad), reasoning (true and false) and discretion (beautiful and ugly). These standards are not replaced absolutely but they are referred or reduced to the standards of reality (objective) and sincerity (subjective). Theoretically speaking any of the traditional standards would be acceptable, could its reality stand

¹ See my articles in *Liturgical Arts*, xiii (1944), 2 ff. and xiv (1946), 29 ff.

up to the acuteness of judgment of the sense of sincerity characteristic of our generation. Theoretically speaking, it is also possible that a thought is deep though (logically) false, an action sincere though (morally) bad, a work of art profound though (aesthetically) ugly. This teaching is obviously most dangerous in the sphere of conduct. Many a divorce has been excused on the grounds of its being an expression of honesty. In the sphere of conduct, conflicts of realities have always been most conspicuous. How can such conflicts arise with an apparently entirely subjective conception of reality?

The connection between, let me say, the christian and the modern conceptions of reality is most evident in the fact that for both reality is chiefly experienced through resistance. What is the reality of the real presence, or why did the Reformers object to this teaching? Indeed not because they did not believe that Christ was present in the Blessed Sacrament, but because they thought that the reality of his presence was misinterpreted as that kind of reality which appears to us in the external reality, say, of a wall, whereas it was to them an entirely internal reality. Transubstantiation, they said, does not take place on the altar but in the heart of the faithful. This conception of internal reality seems to be (and in fact has been described as) the first step towards the modern conception of reality. However, the outstanding characteristic in the constitution of the, let me say, Protestant conception of reality (from Luther to Kant) is the absence of the experience of resistance. Christ is in the faithful only if and as long as they believe. His presence is not a reality which once established can no longer be evaded, pierced or neglected. Similarly Baptism, the only other sacrament recognised by the Reformers, does no longer imprint a character to, but is a seal put on the faith of, a person.

The modern teaching on reality, however, is most emphatic on the fact that true reality cannot be evaded and is permanent, whether the subjective bearer lives up to it or not. The fundamental standards of conduct derived from this conception of reality are therefore sincerity, that is, the direct acceptance and expression of reality, and fidelity, that is, the lasting allegiance to it. From this viewpoint, the superficial excuses made for divorces (in married life or in other spheres of life) on the grounds of 'honesty' are in conflict with the fundamental conception of the modern idea of reality. Both for the Christian and for the modern post-Christian, reality is hard, crisp and palpable, something substantial rather than (as in Protestantism and Cartesianism) something functional.

Still, the modern conception of (internal) reality seems to be completely detached from the traditional conception of (external) reality.

James Joyce said that the clock at the Ballast Office in Dublin was to him a source of realisation. This object in itself is of course negligible. Modern painting and sculpture are characterised by their disregard of material reality; there seems to be in them a tendency to destroy partly or entirely the material object from which reality originated, so as to express the latter. Moreover, the only reality recognised as such by modern philosophy is that which has become transparent or lucid. I hardly strain the meaning of the lines by Rilke which I quoted above when I say that it was only green, sunshine and trees that became real to him in that experience, not, however, blue, water and mountains. Modern man feels that he has to accept the selection, however strange it is, in which reality presents itself to him.

To the Christian, the term 'reality' applies equally to the external and the internal world. In this respect the christian philosophy has never been more unique than it is in the present world. My writing-desk, the accelerator of my car, the death of my father are just as real as the voice of my conscience when a few minutes ago I was about to tell a lie, the love which my daughter has for me, and the Communion of Saints. What the modern conception of reality can teach us anew is that it is futile to speak of various spheres of reality, in particular of higher and lower realities. It sometimes seems that the conception of reality has become so hopelessly materialised or just hackneyed that we have to look for some super-conceptions. The presence of Christ on the altar is real. We may say: It is as real as this wall, and still we may find a zealot who will exclaim: 'No, it is much more real'. More real? More real is evidently no longer real, and therefore not real at all.

Thus I may state once more the meaning of what I described as the chief duty of a Catholic in the modern world. We have to realise and to practise that to us the 'internal' realities of our spiritual life and our faith are as real as the external realities of our physical, economic and social life. To say that the former are even more real to me than the latter is a statement which is likely to be suspected of insincerity. Let us admit first of all that even with regard to the Creed we realise the difference between lucid and non-lucid realities. I do not mean that we understand certain points better than others, but that certain points have for us just that peculiar importance which is characteristic of transparent realities. Who of us can say that Christ's descent into hell is for him as lucid as his birth by the Virgin Mary? I always realise this point most acutely in the recitation of the Rosary. What a gap between the 3rd and the 4th of the joyful and the 4th and 5th of the glorious mysteries! Let us always frankly admit (when we are speaking as private individuals to non-Catholics) where we are speaking of realities lucid to us and where we

just repeat what we have learnt. To us Catholics this may be a point of minor importance. What does it matter whether I am just able to evoke in myself a really fervent belief in this or that mystery? It does matter for our non-Catholic fellow men. To them the most genuine avenue of approach to the truth of the Faith is its significance in an individual, respected, perhaps loved by them. We must not let them down or deceive them. We may even make them see that, far from sheltering behind an authority, we have, in the life of our faith, a tension, quite unknown to them, between personal realisation and objective non-transparent realities.

There is one point at which the Christian and his modern fellow man will always be able to attain to a common realisation of the very foundations of reality. To modern man, the experience of reality is not only the chief source of happiness but also the chief comfort at the thought and in the face of death. In spite of all its apparent superficiality and shocking worldliness, modern youth is convinced that happiness is only found in something lasting, indeed something that will last in the face of, and perhaps even beyond, death. For us Christians the difference between transparent and opaque realities disappears completely at the thought of martyrdom. Our *fides implicita* means that we are prepared and decided to die not only for the truth which has appeared to us but even for that which we have merely accepted. Our non-Catholic fellow men regard it as the supreme and irrefutable test of the reality of our faith that we are prepared to suffer and even die for it. At no time of history perhaps has the blood of the martyrs been more really the seed of the Church.

We are sometimes told that the universal catastrophe in the intellectual, spiritual and mental spheres of which we are contemporaries has opened unprecedented possibilities of Christianisation. Let us not forget that it will have to be a re-Christianisation, that our message has become stale, and that it is hard to produce genuine realisation for a reality which has been proclaimed so many times before. What opens real possibilities for a new contact between the Christian and the non-Christian world is the fact that on both sides men are equally dead serious in the literal sense of the word. Looking back at Rationalism, Materialism, Humanism, Neo-Paganism and all the other bogeys of the last three or four centuries, we realise now that their common characteristic was lack of dead seriousness. They were toying with purely intellectual things, overlooking the really dreadful implications in more vital spheres. Modern man realises that death itself has revolted against this lack of reality. If we really love our fellow men in their agony, we must be, perhaps we must learn from them, to be dead serious about the reality of our faith.

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