

at least some emphasis must be given to the fact that Marxism is a statement *of our age*. The question of revolution does not become inappropriate merely because at a particular stage a particular type of answer is not forthcoming, or even because there seems to be no clear answer at all. It seems to me that one of the merits of Christianity is its commitment to constantly raising the inappropriate question, calling in question even our formulation of revolution itself.

Eucharist: Meaning to Life

by Gerard Mackrell, S.M.M.

It is now some time since Christians tried to find a point of agreement on the Eucharist. The 'Agreed Statement' was the result of discussion between the Catholic Church and the Church of England. Catholics have always been rather cynical about the idea of the Church of England being able to speak as one body, but in this case it appears that there is some doubt as to whether the Catholic Church, in England—never mind the world, was speaking for the whole Catholic body. But that is not a point I wish to pursue. As I see it the terms of reference were too narrow, and the whole issue totally irrelevant in the context of the needs of the world of today. Both Catholics and non-Catholics could and should have used a broader front which would have led to some statement appealing to the needs of all men, Christian and non-Christian alike. For if the 'Agreed Statement' has a Barchester remoteness about it, the Eucharist has not. Today, more than ever, it can have a meaning and relevance; it can offer to man, if not a solution, then the symbol of a solution, to his problems and questionings. We may group these under three headings: (1) Human Dignity; (2) Love; (3) Hope.

Human Dignity

Chapter 6 of St John's Gospel begins by relating a miracle of the feeding of 5,000 people with five loaves and two fishes. It was an action of the kind that would appeal most to the Jews of Christ's day, and the account of it least to men of today. The miraculous element in the Gospel—using 'miraculous' in the strictest sense—is precisely what makes many switch off from what otherwise seems a promising philosophy of life and switch on to Communism, birth control, better means of agriculture; not that these are antithetical;

merely inadequate on their own. Yet the pronouncement of Christ which followed the miracle, the pronouncement which switched off the Jews, could well give a glimmer of light and hope to twentieth-century society. At precisely the point where we are told that

‘after this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him’,

modern man might stop, prick up his ears, and take a few cautious shuffles back towards the synagogue in Capharnaum.

When the crowd of 5,000 had eaten their fill they were in a very receptive mood. This was the language they understood. This sort of thing satisfied not only their immediate bodily hunger but their materialistic expectations of the kingdom of God. Or at least it was a start:

‘This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world’.

Indeed! The starving millions of the world would be equally receptive to a miraculous multiplication of hopelessly inadequate food supplies, and no starving Hindu or Muslim would hesitate between hand and mouth merely because a Christian prophet had worked the miracle. Yet such a ‘miracle’—in the broad sense—could be worked very soon if Christ’s teaching on love and justice were heeded, and the wealthy nations were prepared to share more equitably the fruits of an earth that was given to all mankind, not merely to one geographical section. Nor would this be charity in the Victorian sense of the word; it would be justice. But it would also be love. The liberal theologian who explained (away?) the miracle of the loaves by saying that those with food were persuaded to share with those who had none may have been factually wide of the mark. But he would have been closer to the truth which lay beneath the facts, the truth which an obsession with facts can often hide.

After the miraculous multiplication Christ crossed the sea of Tiberias. Limitless oceans separate his teaching in Capharnaum from his action of multiplying physical food. Those who wanted to make him king are hard on his heels, but he is under no illusions:

‘You seek me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves’ (6, 26).

There appears to be something contradictory in this remark. In the synoptic Gospels the Jews *want* to see signs and are rebuked for doing so (Matt. 12, 38-9; 16, 1-4). The word used on these occasions is the same as that used in John—*semeia*. We might have expected in the two incidents in Matthew *teras* or *thauma*, which are closer to

our understanding of the spectacular miracle. It appears however that *semeion*, although it strictly means 'sign', is used by the synoptics as 'miracle' in the physical, perceptible sense. What John is saying, therefore, is that the crowd do not want to see the miracle *as* a sign. This point is extremely relevant to an understanding of what is happening in the sixth chapter of John. The attitude of the crowd seems reasonable; they want something here and now. Who doesn't? The question facing Jesus was: do I act like an eccentric millionaire and scatter dollar bills for the crowd to scramble at? He decided, instead, to draw their attention to another kind of hunger, the kind which only he could satisfy. He reminds them of their human dignity: the pride, if you like, which prevents many elderly people from seeking public assistance. But, more practical than this, the Oxfam poster proclaims: 'Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for life.' The humanist would find this perfectly acceptable, and it is acceptable to the Christian as far as it goes. It does not go far enough, but it does go far.

Christ, who refused to turn stones into bread, who refused to perform conjuring tricks to entertain Herod, looks at the crowd and tries to get them to think as individuals. His audience is in a receptive mood, but it is a crowd and thinking like a crowd. Nevertheless, Jesus makes an attempt, which many humanists and atheists have made since, to lift man from the level of the beast. He begins by reminding them that food perishes and, still using the imagery of food, tells them that the eater also perishes, miracle or no miracle. Their fathers were miraculously sustained by manna, but they are now dead. In the same way the miraculously resurrected Lazarus was to die again. Having given them this reminder of the grim realities of life and death he offers a solution. But it is heavy going and he is having difficulty getting through to them. Earlier, when speaking of the 'bread of God', the crowd had replied: 'Lord, give us this bread always', in much the same good-humoured way as the woman at the well had welcomed the springs of living water which would save her the daily chore of fetching water from the well. However, it is at this point that we have to be careful. When Christ speaks of death he is not necessarily drawing the attention of the crowd to a life after death. He is tackling the human tragedy enunciated by Heraclitus in his doctrine of eternal flux. Is life merely a matter of survival, of staying alive, of eating and drinking and reproducing future generations of eaters and drinkers? Is the life of the woman at the well merely her daily chores and promiscuous love-life? Is it bingo and a bottle of Guinness, the eternal ghastly rattle of the coffee-spoons? Or are there other values?

In any rapprochement between Christians and non-Christians this step has to be taken before we make the leap to immortality. For millions the leap to that act of faith will never be made anyway.

In this chapter of John, Jesus is anxious to show what human living—as opposed to human existence—is like in this life, before moving on to the next. The Christian may well argue that it is only in terms of eternity that this life can have any meaning at all, that it is only in terms of God that man can have human dignity. Any other theory would, to the Christian, be a bleak stoical fatalism, the nightmare philosophy of the ‘party’ in Orwell’s *1984*. That is all very well for the Christian. In this Gospel episode, however, the thinking is more complicated; and the complication arises partly out of the paradox of ‘flesh and spirit’, so much an element of John’s Gospel. It is at this point that differences arise between Christians, and the Christian/non-Christian division becomes triangular. Christ emphasizes that his flesh is to become food while at the same time insisting on a non-physical, non-fleshy way of thinking:

‘It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail’ (63).

He then adds, by way of explanation of the eucharist:

‘The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life’.

It is clear the ‘flesh’ here does not refer to Christ’s body: that would be an absurd contradiction. We do receive his body in the eucharist, or rather, we receive him. Nevertheless ‘spirit’ and ‘flesh’ are involved in this teaching. The crowd are invited to eat Christ there and then, not after the last supper. He is clearly, therefore, including a spiritual sense to the eating, a sense which must be very much involved even after the sacrament has been instituted. He wishes to be the symbol there and then of another kind of living, of another set of values. He is no longer satisfying an appetite but trying to create one. He is ‘spirit’ as opposed to the ‘flesh’ of routine drudgery, addictive pleasures, despair, thought-stifling activity. He is inviting the crowd to begin to live at this moment:

‘As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me’ (57).

The Greek *dia* with the Accusative can refer to either final or efficient causality: live because of me, for the sake of me. The Jerusalem Bible removes the ambiguity by rendering it ‘draw life from’, thus firmly opting for efficient causality, particularly if we note the parallel Christ draws between his dependence on the Father and our dependence on him. Yet even here final causality is not ruled out; we can draw life from someone in the sense of living *because of* them. They are our motive for living. Without Christ there is nothing to live for. In the sacrament of the Eucharist it is the efficient causality of Christ that is stressed; he is our food in almost a physical sense. Yet it is dangerous to lose sight of the wider meaning;

the Eucharist is the clinching proof of the reality of the incarnation, of the love that led to it and from it, of the dignity conferred automatically on humanity by the physical fact of it, and of the hope that springs from what the Incarnate Word said.

Franz Kafka wrote a remarkable story of a young bank clerk who turned into a beetle. After the first shock of this unfortunate metamorphosis it was not long before he and his family got down to the practical problems of diet and habitat. Kafka died in time to avoid the Nazi occupation of his country and the certainty of Auschwitz, but had he experienced that horror he would have seen grimly confirmed his views on the incorrigible adaptability of man. Darwin proved that we must adapt to survive; he did not speak of living. Christ did, and still does, and he means living as human beings.

Love

The Catholic teaching on the Eucharist is undoubtedly in accord with what Christ says in painstaking detail in John's Gospel. It is as if John foresaw the Reformation and sprinkled a few Zwinglis among the now hostile crowd, merely to emphasize that it was really and truly his body that we would eat in the sacrament. It is natural that theologians should make brave attempts to explain how this could happen, and Trent gave what it hoped was the 'final solution'. In a recent article,¹ Brian Byron gives a brief account of how many Catholic theologians no longer accept the philosophy of transubstantiation, while at the same time accepting the reality of Christ's presence. Having read this survey, I should make it plain that I do not intend to become involved in controversies about transubstantiation. Apart from being ill-equipped to do so, I see this as threatening to bring me within vision of the dreaming spires of Barchester. I would, therefore, like to approach this question from a less technical angle.

Psychologically, ingestive imagery has lent itself readily to the expression of love, since love tends to union, and eating and drinking are the closest forms of this. 'Honey', 'Sugar', 'Sweetheart' derive from the sense of taste. We speak of 'devouring' an enjoyable book. Likewise the meal has always been a sign of love or friendship. If we invite someone to dinner it is not because we think that they are dying of hunger; the meal is to be, to use a rather worn phrase, a feast of soul. A guest who rattled a knife and fork with us, but whose only other contribution was a smacking of the lips or appreciative grunts, would hardly be invited again. Eating and drinking are occasions, or pretexts, for those in love, to be together, whether it be in the Savoy or in a coffee bar, or merely a bar. Body and soul could be kept together without such occasions, as St Paul explains to the Corinthians:

¹'Transubstantiation.' *Irish Theological Quarterly*, January, 1973.

'When you meet together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating each one of you goes ahead with his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk' (Cor. 11, 20-22).

The Last Supper is a poignant example of the sustaining element of love at a meal. At a time when a Jew would want to be within the warmth of his family circle we have this rather ominous and at times mournful stag-party in 'digs'. Joy and sadness, life and death are part of the menu. The host tells his guests that his death by violence is imminent and that one of them will betray him. Then he tells them that they will follow him, that they must not be afraid; he will send them a Comforter, but the world will hate them. It is a concentrated account of the joy and sorrow of life, of the pain and happiness of being a follower of Christ.

Solemn and dear occasions are of their nature fixed and repugnant to change. The rigidity of the Liturgy and its formality are not only practical necessities but emotionally heightening. Lovers, looking back on their first, or last, meal together often recall the exact circumstances: there was a blue candle on the table; you spilled the salt. It is not, of course, too healthy to live in the past like that, but the Mass is very much in the present. For Catholics and many non-Catholic Christians it is not a question of mere reminiscence or reconstruction, but of re-enactment. Christ is the priest and victim. It is happening again, or rather still happening. Even if we take the view that the Mass is not a sacrifice, that the bread does not become the body of Christ, the symbolism can still be more than a whiff of nostalgia drifting down through the centuries. The bread and wine become a symbol of Christ's loving presence through faith, of his closest union with us.

Through faith: the danger to the Catholic is the danger of over-reaction, though it should be said immediately that this danger is in devotion rather than in doctrine. In reaction to the Berengarian heresy that Christ only becomes sacramentally present for the individual who believes in this presence, the Catholic may find himself forced into the false position of making the ontological presence of Christ an end in itself. I do not think it a caricature to say that for some Catholics the consecrated host is regarded as a kind of radioactive isotope emitting some divine energy into the surrounding atmosphere. Christ's eucharistic presence is unique, it is true, but how and why?

At a psychological or epistemological level we would never accept the identification of real and physical presence. Yet when we say that Christ is really though not physically present on the altar we tend to think of this as a watering down of his presence. It is here that we come to the question of love. Loved ones are more really present to us than those unloved who are physically present. Our lives are lived inside our heads; it is no use having an apple if we do not *know* that

we have it. It is in our consciousness that we live; without it we exist.

If the Mass, then, is to have any meaning we must recall what we said about meals in general. Their success stands or falls by the atmosphere in which they are eaten. This atmosphere must be one of love, one of union. We must be convinced first of all of our ontological union as men, as Christians. The beginning of Canon IV is an excellent reminder of our solidarity in sin as well as of the love of God for the whole human tribe. The bond of love is the Holy Spirit, without whom the banquet is a funeral feast; and so we pray that

‘all of us who share in the body and blood of Christ be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit’.

For the body and blood of Christ are the sign of that unity:

‘Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for all partake of the one bread’ (1 Cor. 10, 17).

The cynical hypocrisy of so many of our meals, the rush of ‘business lunches’, the alcoholic euphoria of cocktail parties, may put a strain on modern man when he is invited to adjust himself to sincerity at the Mass. But then the whole Gospel puts this strain on us. Coffee parties in the church hall after Mass can be excruciating in their awkwardness and condescension, and may not be the real solution. Love is based on respect for the human person, the dignity of simply being human—for a start. And this respect is based on faith and hope.

Hope

It is now time to return to the fullness of the promise in the sixth chapter of John—an immortality of loving union with God through Christ. Here the grim realities of the Heraclitean flux are put firmly in their place. It is true that love and lovers die, often the first before the second. Christ offers the Eucharist as a pledge of survival after death, of a true living after death: ‘He who eats this bread will live for ever’. This life is not to be a disembodied existence of shades and ghosts; the body of Christ is the symbol of the resurrection and its promise: ‘I will raise him up on the last day’. This hope will never communicate itself without the practice of the love which the eucharist embodies. We have to give ourselves to others. be eaten by them, be drained by them, wasted in sorrow at their sufferings. Oscar Wilde’s touching little fairy tale of *The Happy Prince*, the statue that dies of exposure by denuding itself of its costly garments to help the poor, is not a bad allegory of what is involved here. Hope can only come from love here and now. Children with drunken and cruel fathers do not appreciate rhapsodies on the meaning of ‘Abba’;

the non-Christian will not be warmed with hope in a future life if the loveless lives of its teachers are all he sees of the Christ who is eaten in love, and eaten away with love.

Hope must not be confined, therefore, to the next life. As we have been at pains to point out, that will be irrelevant to most people today, and the Eucharist is for them as well as for the converted. In what way can we say that the Eucharist is for them? Not by scratching about for episcopal permissions to give communion to non-Catholics. This is despair, not hope. It is also unnecessary. It indicates that non-Catholics need an outward sign of misplaced courtesy when what they need is faith, and this faith is given in different doses. If they believe in Christ's abiding loving presence, in his concern for the hunger of humanity at all levels, then they receive the Eucharist at that level. They are in communion with Christ. To offer them the consecrated species would be both an act of impatience and impertinence. Who are we to say that their level of faith is not enough for them? Or that the time will not come when they will receive the fullness of faith and be able to believe in the Mystical Body with its one visible Head on earth? Even among communicating Catholics there are these different levels. Although objectively there is one Catholic faith, subjectively there are as many degrees of faith as there are Catholics. Watch a Sunday congregation to see this; and they are the ones who are at least physically present. It would also be despair and impertinence to see the Church as an ecclesiastical Oxfam. The Church has to see the hunger that is not satisfied by bread alone. Outside non-conformist churches coloured posters often invite the passer-by to come in and share in the faith. Catholics and Anglicans may smile at the apparent crudeness of this, and at its frequent ineffectiveness. The Catholic, in particular, may preen himself on his full churches; but what about Mass during the week, the Mass with no obligation attached? With a gun at our heads we need no posters.

'Are you lonely?' said one poster. Yes, we are. We feel useless and insignificant. We want to belong. We want everyone to belong to the Body of Christ. Let us try to relate our eucharistic teaching to the whole of Christianity; and transubstantiation can look after itself.

Virginia Woolf and the Corinthians

by Hamish F. G. Swanston

Leonard Woolf, in *Downhill all the Way*, remarked of his wife that 'the idea of a party always excited her', and though it is true that on 11th November, 1918, 'Virginia and I celebrated the end of a