

here or not lies beyond the scope of the present essay.

- 1 The concept of faith has a use outside religious contexts, but my concern in this essay is solely with Christian religious faith.
- 2 Bernard Williams *Descartes* (Harmondsworth, 1978).
- 3 William James, 'The Will to Believe', reprinted in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York, 1956).
- 4 John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1963), p 66.
- 5 Keith Lehrer, *Knowledge* (Oxford, 1974), p 63.

Grace and Persecution

Sheila Cassidy

This essay is an attempt to illustrate the idea that the way in which God's grace works in man is more obvious in a situation of persecution than in one of so-called peace, for in the former the contrast between good and evil, the graced and the graceless, is sharper and therefore easier to see.

St Thomas Aquinas, the great thirteenth century theologian, defines that mysterious entity "grace" as a "share in the Divine nature". Having read this we recognize that he has said both everything and nothing. In this life we perceive God only as "a dim reflection as in a mirror" (1Cor. 13:12) and we can therefore know nothing of his nature, so we cannot catch hold of Grace and say "it is this", or "it is that". Granted the impossibility of talking about God, of finding words adequate to discuss his nature, we can nevertheless attempt to understand what happens to a man when he deliberately lays himself open to God's action.

"Christ is the image of the unseen God" (Col. 1:17).

"He who has seen me has seen the Father".

Scripture tells us that Christ is the revelation of God and so we must look to the man Jesus if we are to understand what happens to a creature when he partakes of the Divine Nature. The Jesus revealed in the gospels is not the glorious conqueror long awaited by the Jews but a humble carpenter who becomes an itinerant preacher destined for an ignominious death. It is this Jesus who is

persecuted, suffers and dies on the cross, who shows what it means to share in God's life. It is this Crucified Christ that St Paul preaches to his followers: God is not to be understood in terms of philosophy and human wisdom but in the scandalous folly of a man who gave himself totally for the sake of others, lived a life of humble service to the poor and the powerless and died on a cross like a common criminal. We see him stripped of his clothes, his position, his identity:

“so disfigured did he look
that he seemed no longer human –
a thing despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering,
a man to make people screen their faces.” Isaiah 52:14

This, then, is the Good News: “to the Jews an obstacle”, “to the pagans madness” (1 Cor. 1:22): it is the news that a man must die if he is to be reborn, that he must be stripped of all he holds dear; it is the call to discipleship: to follow “Christ who is the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24).

Part I: COSTLY GRACE – the Call to Discipleship

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writing some years before his imprisonment for anti-Nazi activities, speaks of the call to discipleship as grace. In spelling out just what this sharing in Christ's life can and must mean he coins the term “costly grace” “Such grace is *costly* because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life . . . Costly grace is the incarnation of God”. (Bonhoeffer *Costly Grace*).

Accepting Bonhoeffer's definition of grace as the call to discipleship and the living out of that life of Christ-following, it is clear that this is a call to all men at all times and in all places. At the time of Christ his unequivocal statement that “he who is not for me is against me” made the call to follow clear (although it did not make it easy). In the post-apostolic era too, when Christianity was proscribed and Christians were killed for their belief, the call to discipleship was a clear one. Paradoxically, it was when Christianity became respectable that the demands of discipleship became obscured, watered down, so that the following of Christ was no longer so closely linked in men's minds with the carrying of the cross. That which had been the demanding religion of a small and socially unacceptable group of men became the professed creed of emperors, princes and society ladies: Christianity had been tamed – the “wild stallion domesticated into a riding-school pony”. (Cullinan: *Roots of Social Injustice*)

At divers times and in divers places, however, Christianity becomes again a persecuted religion. True, men are less often burned

at the stake for the simple profession of their faith, but they are increasingly harrassed and killed for defending the powerless and for denouncing oppression and injustice. In these situations the *cost* of discipleship becomes again abundantly clear and the persecuted Church becomes once more a sign – a sacrament – of Christ alive today in his Church. This vision of Christ in the persecuted is not always a comforting one for those involved in the conflict, for while Christians killed by Communists in China are all a familiar part of the tradition of the suffering Church, less easy to accept as a martyr is the Latin American Marxist killed by practising Roman Catholics, because he worked to defeat oppression.

Persecution, therefore, is a Sign of the Times, a *call* to examine the nature of our own discipleship, a *witness* to the power of faith (articulated or not) in God and a *demand* to examine our attitude to the oppressed, the oppressors and the militant liberators of the so-called “Third World”. It is in such a situation that Bonhoeffer’s words can be truly understood, for there is no room for hedging, for fence-sitting – when good and evil are stripped of their disguises men are forced to choose, to take sides, to commit themselves and it is in this act of *commitment* that we may examine the workings of grace.

It is perhaps not surprising that a Latin American theologian should define grace in terms of liberty: should equate the share in the life of God with commitment to the underprivileged, and apathy, lack of commitment, with sin. Juan Luis Segundo living in the right-wing dictatorship of Uruguay, defines liberty as “not merely the capacity to choose but the positive quality of determining one’s own existence for oneself”. For him, non-liberty is not the physical lack of freedom but “allowing oneself to be taken over by egotism and ease”. This is for him the evil “the law of minimum effort”.

Karl Rahner too sees the inability to make an act of commitment because of fear and uncertainty not only as lack of freedom but as servitude: “A man who refuses to commit himself for fear of following an insight that cannot be mathematically verified does *not* in fact remain free but rather enters upon the worst of all commitments – that of living life without commitment. He tries to live life as a neutral, deciding nothing, and that in itself is a decision”. (From “The Heart has its Seasons”. Savary and O’Connor).

Discipleship, then, equals commitment – a positive decision to live a life of love which in practical terms means a life of service to others. The decision to follow Christ can only be made by the free – those who abandon other calls to seek him single-heartedly. It is in this field that our language becomes inadequate, for we are speaking of man’s relationship with his creator. Discipleship – the

following of Christ – *is* freedom: it is the way to life shared with God and at the same time it *is* life shared with Him. Grace is the call to be free and at the same time it is the gift disposing and enabling man to answer that call to freedom.

If we consider the situation in one of the many Latin American dictatorships we can see clearly not only the options available but the results of response and of failure to respond to the call to discipleship. The starting point is one of gross inequality in the sharing out of available wealth between different groups of men. In the majority of these countries the wealth, land and means of production is in the hands of something like 10% of the population, while the majority (80-90%) of the people live in conditions which are classed as sub-human. It is a situation as old as time itself – a world divided into the haves and the have-nots, the powerful and the powerless, the “free” and the captive. (Here we are using “free” in its physical rather than its spiritual sense.)

How is it possible for men to eat oysters and drink whiskey when there are hungry children crowded around the restaurant door? How can women wear silks and furs while others are cold and in rags? What happens in the hearts of men and women who deliberately maintain a status quo of hunger and illiteracy and sub-human living conditions so that their own comfort and security may be assured?

It is in considering the mentality of the uncaring wealthy that we can understand more fully the power of Segundo’s interpretation of grace as freedom. A further aid to the understanding of this situation is the Old Testament concept of blindness. The privileged in an unjust society are unable to initiate or accept the changes leading to a fair distribution of wealth for one of two reasons:

- 1 they do not see the necessity for change
- 2 they are afraid to let go of their own security.

If we consider first of all the situation of those who do not see we are faced with the questions “Why do they not see?” and “Is their blindness culpable and therefore sinful?”

We have in the story of Dives and Lazarus, the Christian answer to both of these questions: Dives was a rich man who feasted and made merry while a man died of hunger on his doorstep. He did not “see” Lazarus either because he had built a wall around his house to shut out the sight of the poor and the hungry or because, although he could physically “see” the man he had “hardened his heart” against him and did not consider him fully human. When Dives died he went to hell – he was damned because of his blindness: because of the blindness caused by the deliberate hardening of his heart.

In Latin America today, this blindness is the root of a widespread belief among the privileged class that the poor are somehow a different species from themselves. They allow themselves to believe that their physical, cultural and emotional needs are different – somehow they do not believe that the poor feel hunger, nakedness, unemployment, the death of a child, in the same way that they do. There is, of course, a terrible grain of truth in this belief, for the oppressed become accustomed to their sub-human state and become too apathetic to work to change their destiny.

Without presuming to judge individuals, it is of interest to examine the causes of this widespread blindness among the privileged classes, for they are at the root of the unjust, unchristian pattern of these societies (and in a less clear way of our own society).

The first way in which our behaviour is determined is by the conditioning effect of the society in which we grow up and that in which we live our adult lives. The children of the privileged are brought up to *expect* a certain life-style as their right and due. A small child will not question his right to a warm and secure home, toys, sweets, visits to the theatre and holidays by the sea. It is only when he reaches manhood that he is likely to become aware of the injustice of the society in which he lives and even then awareness may not lead him to change his life-style. So powerful are the factors conditioning those who live in an affluent society that it requires great strength and vision to free themselves from this way of thinking and living. When all a man's friends and colleagues live in a certain type of house, drive a certain style of car, live in a certain way, it requires a major change in his convictions to live differently. In addition to the conditioning factors of the people among whom they live there are the "needs" which are deliberately created in them by the commercial enterprises. Constant exposure to advertisements for luxury foods, hi-fis, furniture, cars, clothes, creates a "need" in those exposed. I was content to spend my holidays camping in Devon until a Travel Agency created my need to get away to the sunny beaches of the Algarve, and poor Latin Americans drank water or fruit juice happily for centuries until they were convinced of their need for Coca Cola.

Conditioned as we are, however, the truth is there to be seen by those who have the desire and the openness of mind and heart to see it.

What happens, then, to the rich young man (or woman) who first becomes aware of injustice in his society? The pain of this discovery is a gift: it is the call to leave all and follow Christ. It is grace. Like the young man in the gospel, some go away sad because they do not have the strength to extricate themselves from their circumstances. Are they refusing grace – hardening their hearts?

Perhaps they are. What is clear is that for the majority of people this is a very slow and gradual process in which either one act of acceptance of grace leads to a further opening up, or one act of refusal leads to the beginning of that process of hardening of heart which culminates years later in total blindness.

It is perhaps of interest to trace in hypothetical terms these different paths of refusal and acceptance of grace.

If we take two boys of 12 years of age from wealthy homes, we could confront each of them with a similar situation: the first boy – we can call him Dives (which means ‘rich man’) – meets in his father’s house the son of the woman who does his mother’s washing. The two boys are left together for the afternoon to play in the garden. Dives, well accustomed to playing with his school friends and sharing his treasures with them, is somehow wary of this boy who looks and speaks so differently from himself. Afraid that the stranger will damage his new bicycle he locks it in the garage and, unwilling to make an effort to entertain him, he retires to the garden seat with a book. Lazarus, hurt by this lack of friendship and trust, refuses to come any more and the two boys never meet again. Thus, at the age of 12, Dives has made a positive decision of self-love – he has manifested the fundamental causes of blindness – lack of concern for another human being and fear of losing his own security. He has already begun a certain pattern of behaviour in which, assured of his own superiority, he does not allow the underprivileged into his life. He has built an emotional barrier beyond which they may not pass so that he will never come to know them as people. Thus, as he grows older, he will share the convictions of his friends that ‘these people’ are different from himself – stupid, indolent, irresponsible and dishonest. With this conviction firmly in mind it then becomes justifiable to deny them the vote, the right to reunion and, at times the right to life.

This gradual process of hardening of the heart is a pattern of repeated refusals of grace – it is the “broad way” of the scriptures which leads to perdition or, in Segundo’s terminology, it is the following of the *law of minimum effort*. Dives does not set out deliberately to become wicked – but he refuses to make the effort to give himself in love: he slides imperceptibly into the life of egotism which makes of him a captive, a being incapable of risking his security for love. He has followed the line of least resistance, been moulded by the society in which he lives until he reaches the point where he is deaf to the cries of the oppressed, blind to the begging children on the cathedral steps. Dives has rejected the ‘scary freedom’ (Cullinan) of discipleship: he has rejected grace.

The path just traced is, of course, only a hypothetical one to

show how it is possible to arrive at a state of culpable blindness. It is not suggested that the initial refusal of grace shuts Dives off from the possibility of acceptance at a later date – merely that he himself has embarked upon a way of life in which he becomes progressively trapped by the world, the flesh and the devil and therefore less free to change his life. That God's grace can achieve the liberation of any man from any degree of slavery is taken as read.

And what of the other twelve-year old? We can now consider what happens to Peter, the son of the rich neighbour and colleague of Dives' father. Peter, when asked to look after a less privileged boy opens his heart and his house to him. He shows him his precious new bicycle and regardless of the fact that it might be damaged teaches Lazarus to ride it. The boys play together until they are exhausted and then climb into Peter's tree-house to talk. They become friends and Peter asks his mother if Lazarus may come again. In the long summer holiday that follows, Peter becomes aware not only that Lazarus is a boy like himself, but that he has a very different home. It is not long before he persuades Lazarus to accept his penknife as a gift and asks his mother if they could not spare some clothes for Lazarus' brothers and sisters.

So Peter, by opening himself up to a stranger, opens himself up to grace – by risking his love and his possessions he enters upon the way of freedom that leads to clearer seeing and more acute hearing. If he continues to remain open in this way Peter will find himself drawn on into the path of discipleship, drawn to a life of constant giving and progressive denial of self. As he is slowly 'graced', 'Christened', Peter will free himself from his attachment to ease and possessions, and his unselfish love and fearless pursuit of truth and justice will be rewarded by freedom – by grace.

Just as Dives has the possibility of accepting grace at any time in his life, so Peter has the possibility of refusal. The path he has chosen is narrow and steep and he will be tempted by power and ease and security. But however great the attractions of his environment he will be given the strength to continue his discipleship.

It would, of course, be possible to consider the factors affecting those two boys in much greater detail. Twelve is an age when they have already been strongly conditioned by their parents, so their response to a stranger will already be governed by the attitude of their parents. Likewise their future behaviour will be conditioned by parental attitude to their respective acts of selfishness and generosity. It would take too long to discuss this in greater detail and the main thesis would remain unchanged: that human beings are gratuitously offered the grace of discipleship and their acceptance or rejection is free but is partially conditioned by their environment. This call to discipleship is a continuous one from the age

of reason to death, but a man will choose a way of behaviour that makes it easier or less easy for him to hear that call, so that he may ultimately reach a stage of total deafness and blindness: of hardness of heart.

The conditioning factors discussed above are different in different societies; it is obvious that the child of wealthy materialistic parents in an affluent society will be subject to one set of influences, while the daughter of an illiterate alcoholic peasant, malnourished, underfed, sexually abused, will be equally though differently oppressed. There are many forms of captivity and it is this concept of lack of freedom of peoples that is the basis of the Theology of Liberation.

In addition to the external conditioning factors that make a man less free, there is what St Paul refers to as *the flesh*. (The external conditioning factors are equivalent to *the world*). St Paul is eloquent in his description of the battle of his "spiritual" will with his "unspiritual" carnal desires: "I cannot understand my own behaviour. I fail to carry out the things I want to do and I find myself doing the very things I hate". (Romans 7:16) This constant warring of the desire to do what is right with the human urges to selfishness, greed, self-gratification and sloth, is an integral part of the cost of discipleship.

It is always fascinating to realize the truth of the Pauline belief that God "chooses" the weak as his disciples so as to manifest his strength in them. Disciples are not always the pure strong-willed clean-living ascetics that one would expect — they are ordinary men and women with thorns in their flesh to keep them humble and in whom the grace of God is manifest in spite of — perhaps because of — their weakness of temper or appetite.

The constant factor in discipleship is love — a love which overcomes the tendency to sloth and selfishness, a love which drives out fear of loss, insecurity and death.

Part II: MARTYRDOM — grace made visible

"What do grace and glory mean except that man can endure in the midst of absolute fire, in the midst of incomprehensibility." Karl Rahner.

The foregoing descriptions of the path leading to discipleship and that leading to hardness of heart are valid for any society at any time. It is, however, in situations of frank persecution that we see the naked contrast of good and evil, of the graced and the hard of heart. It is in contrasting the behaviour of the martyr and his persecutors that we can see the action of grace at its clearest — and even so it remains a mystery.

It is a curious fact that those of us who live in relative tranquillity need to be reminded that martyrdom is not a phenomenon of a

glorious Christian era long since passed. Perhaps it is because we are afraid of the demand that the contemporary martyrs make upon us that we look over the bodies of the recently dead to the plaster effigies of men and women of another century. T. S. Eliot wrote "but the son of man is crucified always and there shall be martyrs and saints" and each week we hear of the deaths of men and women who have taken a stand for justice, freedom and equality. Martyrdom is a sign: it is a revelation of the power of God, it is grace made visible.

A study of the accounts of the martyrdom of men and women of different centuries and of their last writings or words reveals both an incredible diversity of people and a common pattern of thought. Martyrs are drawn from the ranks of clergy and laity, men and women, rich and poor, and they are all characterized by an extraordinary love for God and their fellow men which gives them the strength to accept death freely. Karl Rahner speaks of martyrdom as the "supreme act of love" and says that "Martyrdom for the sake of the Christian and Catholic faith has always, since the patristic period, been regarded in the theological tradition as a miracle (because it *transcends man's normal moral strength*) and therefore is an argument for the divine origin of Christianity" (Karl Rahner: *Encyclopedia of Theology*).

Whether or not we can accept the traditional theological teaching that Christian martyrdom is a miracle, there is no doubt that the willing acceptance of violent death because of adherence to a moral principle is an act of superhuman strength. The co-existence of this willing acceptance with fear of death and a passionate desire to go on living are characteristic of the martyrs and sufficient proof that these are normal people and not unbalanced fanatics or death-seekers.

Perhaps even more striking than the willing acceptance of death of the martyrs is the power to forgive their persecutors. This phenomenon, inexplicable on purely psychological grounds, has characterized the martyrs since the time of Stephen up to the present day. St Luke records Stephen crying out "Lord, do not remember this sin against them", (Acts 7:60) and it would be possible to quote from accounts of the deaths of Polycarp, St Alban Roe, the Carthusians from the London Charterhouse and many others.

If we are tempted to wonder whether this remarkable acceptance of suffering and forgiveness of their persecutors has been attributed to the martyrs by pious biographers it is interesting to read the last testimonies of some of those Germans who were executed by the Nazis for resistance to Hitler's regime. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who had first written about the cost of discipleship in 1937, wrote in his last letter before his execution in 1944:

“You must never doubt that I walk joyfully and thankfully this path in which I am being led.” 23 August 1944.

His poetry, however, reveals the fear and anguish he experienced in solitary confinement: a fear that was compatible with his assertion that his *via crucis* was joyous:

“Lord God,
great misery has come on me.
My weight of cares is crushing me
I do not know what to do.
O God, be merciful and help,
Give strength to bear whatever thou dost send,
let not fear overwhelm me.”

Such calm strength is perhaps to be expected in a minister of the church of the calibre of Bonhoeffer – a man under no illusions as to the ultimate cost of his own discipleship. In some ways more remarkable is the testimony of Kim Malthe Braun, a 22-year old cabin boy who was executed in April 1945 for his activities in an anti-Nazi organization. On 2 March 1945 Kim was tortured to the point of losing consciousness; the following day he wrote “One other strange thing. I felt absolutely no hatred. Something happened to my body; it was only the body of a boy, and it reacted as such. But my soul was occupied with something completely different”. (From *Dying We Live*)

From where do these men and women gain the strength to face death in this way? Is there some deep psychological mechanism which allows them to master their fear and write edifying last letters to their families? Is there some collective morale by which one encourages the other, buoying him up until the last moment?

A recent study of torture victims by a group of psychiatrists reached the following conclusion: the ability to withstand torture was directly proportional to the degree of commitment of the prisoner to his cause. This is simply a statement in scientific language of a truth disciples have always known: that if they remain faithful to their call they will not be tried beyond their strength.

Martyrdom means witness: witness to a faith in God, in man, in the Truth. It is the ultimate paradox of Christian belief that those who most loved God and who appear to have been abandoned by him have an unshakable faith in his love for them. Edith Stein, refusing to run from the Nazis, was taken from her Carmelite convent in Holland and died in Auschwitz in 1942. Her understanding of the grace given to those who suffer persecution for righteousness sake is like that of Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

“God demands nothing of man without at the same time giving him the strength to accomplish it. Faith teaches this, and the experience of life in the faith confirms it. The innermost part of

the soul is a vessel into which the spirit of God flows when by virtue of its freedom, it opens itself to him. And God's spirit is mind and strength. He gives new life to the soul and makes it capable of achievements of which its nature alone would not be equal, and at the same time he gives direction to its activity".

(From "Finite and Eternal Being", extracted from *Dying We Live*.)

Another remarkable feature of the writings of those who have died in witness to their faith is the clarity of their spiritual vision. Solitary confinement while awaiting death is the desert experience at its most terrible and powerful. Stripped of friendship, physical possessions, former identity, these men and women are forced into naked confrontation with their creator. Robbed even of the hope of freedom they must examine anew their belief in the existence of God and the purpose of life. In this context it is interesting to quote again from the writing of the young seaman Kim Malthe Braun:

"Suddenly, just as in raising one's eyes, I saw my old thought in a completely new light. I understood it thus (remember that every season has its garb): the teaching of Jesus should not be something that we follow just because we have been taught to do so and permit ourselves to be influenced by this. We should live, *not by the letter* of his precepts but rather *in conformity with* them, complying with a deeply felt inspiration that should come not as an influence from without, but from the heart, from the innermost depths of the soul, as is the case with every inspiration. At this moment there comes to me, as one of the profoundest truths I have learned from Jesus, the perception that one should live solely according to the dictates of one's soul."

St Thomas More is more explicit in his appraisal of the spiritual value of his experience in prison:

"Among all his great benefits heaped upon me so thick, I reckon, upon my faith, my imprisonment even the very chief." (From a letter from Thomas More to his daughter.)

Christian martyrdom, then, is a sacrament: it is an occasion of great grace and it is a visible sign of that grace. It is a witness that is "a total realization of faith and testifies not only to faith but to the reality of what is believed." (Karl Rahner in *Encyclopedia of Theology*.)

It has long been recognized that martyrdom is an inspiration to those who know of it and especially to those who witness it. It is indeed a paradox of grace that the sufferings of the martyrs have served to encourage rather than dissuade their fellow Christians. The account of the martyrdom of Polycarp – the earliest genuine account of Christian martyrdom – shows the powerful effect that

the valiant death of the octogenarian bishop had upon those who saw him die:

“Not only was he a famous Doctor, he was a martyr without fear; and one whose martyrdom all aspire to imitate, so fully does it accord with the Gospel of Christ”. (From Evarestus’ account of the martyrdom of Polycarp – in *Early Christian Writings*.)

Of particular interest is the way in which the most violent persecution failed to destroy the church in 17th century Japan. Even after the death of the clergy the faith remained alive, clandestinely, among the people for nearly 300 years.

“The son of man is crucified always . . .” (T. S. Eliot). Today, martyrdom is not always recognized and not always acclaimed, but men and women die each day in defence of their faith in the Truth. Communists die in Chile, Argentina and the Philipines at the hands of practising Roman Catholics while Christians are imprisoned and killed by Communists in Cambodia, Lithuania and Russia. Little by little, accounts of heroic endurance and incomprehensible forgiveness filter out of prisons and are passed by word of mouth or written on scraps of papers. The gracious giving of the lives of those who die becomes a challenge and an encouragement to others – it is the clearest call to discipleship. Here indeed grace is made visible, for young men from comfortable professional families hear in the cries of the dispossessed the call to discipleship. Their answer is indeed costly, for it costs them their lives, but they know that this is the price of their own liberation and that of their fellow countrymen – they freely and knowingly choose to share in the paschal mystery and in doing so in the Divine life.

“And for their jailers and for their torturers – a thought. The saddest of all, they are the most maimed, and the Day of Reckoning is bound to come.” (From Salvador de Madariaga).

It is impossible to see into the heart of any man, least of all into the heart of one who deliberately inflicts pain and humiliation upon his fellows. Without presuming to judge any individuals it would seem fair to say that here we have the clearest example of the “graceless”, the spiritually blind: the hard of heart.

Juan Luis Segundo gives a description of how man would be without grace:

“He would not be a human being fully capable of carrying out his life. He would be an infirm, divided, tragic being. He would be enslaved by a force or tendency that is labelled concupiscent by theology (Denz. 806, 832)”. (From J. L. S. *Grace and the Human Condition*, Chapter I, Section III.)

It would be difficult to find a more apt description of a torturer – “an infirm, divided, tragic being”. Perhaps it is their first-

hand meeting with the “graceless” that enables the martyrs to see the tragedy of these people’s lives and so to forgive them. Edith Stein writes the only truth that can be said about persecutors – that only God may judge them:

“Let us not judge, lest we ourselves be judged.
Outward semblances delude us all.
Enigmas are the pictures earth presents,
To the Creator only is true being known”.

(From *Dying We Live*).

If the grace of martyrdom is the gift of God to those who choose to follow Christ in a situation of persecution, perhaps the witness of the martyrs is God’s free gift to all men, a call to discipleship which means an invitation to share in the divine life, in the way of the cross which is also the way to life eternal.

Theology and Sociology: Two Approaches To Religious Conversion

Antony Archer O P

This is intended to be a practical comparison between two approaches. Accordingly it would be as well to start with a few truisms that are shared between them. In the first place, people only discover themselves and the world through their relationships with other people and this relationship is primary. Perspectives on the world follow and are fashioned by these relationships. In view of this, theology may be said to be reflection on human experience specifically understood as directed towards God. Thus Schillebeeckx (1969:214) describes man, from a theological point of view, as ‘a free being who must define himself in and towards the world in dialogue with God’. This may be contrasted with the definition of one sort of sociology, ‘critical sociology’, described by Hansen (1976:3) as ‘an invitation to become an involved, critical explorer of human and societal possibilities’.

Unless the theologian is to consider for the most part his own