

FOCUS MAN

Notes on Contemporary Questions in Religion

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INTRODUCTION

In his book, *The Credibility of the Church Today*, Gregory Baum speaks of refocusing the Gospel. For today man has changed his perspective. He has changed his way of looking at himself and God. He has new problems which are difficult and complex. For this reason he must reread the Gospel, not with the same old questions but with new ones: "How do I live a good life in the secular city? How do I express myself as a Christian in the secular age?"

In the Middle Ages, the great philosopher-theologian, Thomas Aquinas, took the Gospel message and translated it into a Greek world view. This world view has no meaning nor relevance to modern man in the secular age today. If the Gospel message is to have any effect today man must return to the Gospel message and retranslate it into a secular world view. This change can sometimes be painful. There is a certain warmth and comfort associated with our old terminology and world view. But for some there is the added problem that the old-world view, i.e. the Greek philosophical world view, is for them the only way possible. Perhaps they have canonized this view as the absolute view and have made it superior to the Gospel.

Surprisingly enough it is not too difficult to retranslate the Gospel message into a secular world view. For when we reread the Gospel, we see that Jesus acted and spoke in a secular way. The whole life of Jesus could be viewed as a single continuing exploit in breaking down walls that separate people from one another. His people were no longer Jews, nor Greeks, no longer circumcised and uncircumcised. He simply refused to allow those religious rites to stand between him and others. He tore down the curtain in the temple between the holy and the profane, between the sacred and the secular, between the priests and the people. By his Incarnation he joined humanity and divinity, the secular and the sacred.

The Sabbath was not sacred time for Jesus. The Sabbath is a day you can take or leave. Sacred time is the moment of another's need. Therefore, according to Dominic Crossan (Chicago, June 1968), all time is the complete synthesis of all need. Likewise, a sacred place is not a given area but the place of your neighbour's need. Jesus seems to throw out sacred caste, as well as sacred books. He was able to get along without the Bible. He could translate sacred books and sacred language into secular terms, e.g. parables of the Good Samaritan, the sheep and the goats, etc.

Although Jesus has joined the sacred and the secular, he has not done away with one or the other. Likewise, in adapting the Christian message to the secular age, the Christian message does not become the secular message. The Christian message must always be in the nature of an "intrusion" into every historical situation. As long as the world has not reached its fullness and completion, the Church can never be

completely integrated with it. The Christian will always be “different”. He will always stand apart, he will be the salt which gives the savor, the leaven which makes the dough rise, until the day comes when the world will become a new heaven, the place of peace and love, the kingdom of God.

Although the following pages are concerned with God and religion, they speak of man and life. They are an attempt to refocus the Gospel on the problems of man today. The language used leans more to the secular than to the pious or theological. This is not a scholarly work for professors in seminaries nor for priests and theologians doing post-graduate studies. It is simply a presentation of practical questions people often ask concerning religion and life with attempts at clarification. These pages actually grew out of workshops, lectures, and retreats. They are not presented in any particular orderly or systematic manner. They are merely an attempt to fill the gap between the speculative theologian and the “man on the street”. They are an effort to help people apply their religion to their daily lives.

PART ONE

FAITH IN A CHANGING WORLD

FAITH VERSUS DOGMA AND LAWS

Dogma and Laws

Many Christians have grown up dedicated more to a system than to the concern with one another as Christ taught. Consequently, a change in the system tends to weaken what they have considered to be faith.

Some have viewed the changes in the government of the Church from a “monarchical” to a “collegial” form as an abandonment of authority. Because the “collegial” form of government allows more involvement of all the people of God in decision making in the Church, there is no longer the apparent “one party line” that is often seen in a totalitarian state. People in the Church are now interested in religious issues. They discuss matters of importance to them. Priests and theologians will respectfully disagree among themselves. Bishops may take positions different from one another as seen at the Vatican council II and on the practical application of the birth control teaching. Often Bishops may disagree with the Pope over matters which are not of faith as did St Paul with St. Peter in the early Church. All this often gives the impression of disorder and uncertainty.

The Canadian Bishops point out that; “The unity of the Church does not consist in a blind conformity in all ideas, but rather in a union of faith and heart, in submission to God’s will and a humble and honest and ongoing search for the truth. That unity of love and faith is founded in Christians as long as we are true to Him nothing can separate us... If this sometimes means that in our desire to make the Church more intelligible and more beautiful we must, as pilgrims do, falter in the way or differ as to the way, no one should conclude that our common faith is lost or our living purpose blunted.” (Cf. Canadian Bishops Statement on *Humanae Vitae*, Sept. 28, 1968.)

Changes in worship and in traditional forms of devotion are often incorrectly seen as a loss in faith or an abandonment of prayer. A number of our traditional devotional forms do seem to be disappearing. If they fade completely, the explanation will be that they no longer serve the experience, mental attitude and social values of the generation of Christians that is now emerging. This is not surprising. It has happened all through the history of the Church, e.g. pilgrimages – they are no longer a vital part of Christian life like they were in the middle ages. The same may be said, to a great extent, of Benediction of the Eucharist, Stations of the Cross, Perpetual Help devotions, etc.

Much misunderstanding stems from a misunderstanding of changing laws. A study of Church history shows here also that a change in disciplinary laws is a normal procedure. Church law changed in the early centuries with regard to celibacy, and the sacrament of Penance; in the Middle Ages with regard to usury, and moneylending; and in the reforms of Trent with regard to the Mass, the breviary and marriage. The recent changes then in the Eucharistic fast, Lenten fast, abstinence, Holy Days of Obligation,

Latin to English, altars turned around and communion standing up, are all normal changes. The work of theologians in attempting to understand more deeply and clearly the truths of Christianity and refocusing the Gospel message around the central important human values have left many people confused because a synthesis of theology has not yet been completed. Reformulating a doctrine, even radically, does not mean rejecting it. For instance, when a theologian says, "heaven and earth do not preoccupy us anymore", he states that most men of today don't care about the after-life, not that there is none. (He may imply that Christian teaching has depicted it in an inadequate way.)

The mysteries of faith are not like mathematical problems which can be solved with the proper formula. They are never solved but always invite us to greater and greater depth. The "truth" cannot be captured in a capsule.

Faith

It is easy to place our faith in the wrong things. Instead of placing our faith in the truth we can place it in the expressions of this truth. Instead of placing our faith in people we can place it in systems of organization. Instead of placing our faith in God we can place it in dogmas and laws. Instead of placing our faith in the goodness and beauty of God that exists in our utmost depths, we can place it in things, material objects, money, reputation and status.

There is a difference between the expression of a truth and the truth itself, between the formula of faith and the reality of faith. A person could know and recite the Apostles Creed and not have faith. Atheists can do this. Christians are not expected to know all the dogmas of the Church. These are often helpful in giving us information about transcendental realities, but they are knowledge and are, as such, distinct from faith.

Faith does not consist in mere reasoning. A person may know all the Scriptures, could be a magnificent theologian and not have faith. Intellectual knowledge about faith is not enough. If faith meant mere reasoning ability, then the most educated would have the most faith. This is obviously not the case.

Faith does not consist merely in obeying laws. If a person is truly concerned with his neighbour it is a good sign that he has faith. However, many people keep the laws of the Church in order to "play it safe". They go to Church on Sunday, keep the laws of the Church, often to the letter, and give assent to the dogmas not because they are really convinced or believe but "just to be sure in case there is a God, and in case there is a next life". Jesus and Paul had stern words against these people in the New Testament. (Cf. Mt 15, 7-9: Galatians 5, 2-6)

Faith is a gift. It means partaking in God's life. Hence the light which we receive is not our doing, but the work of God, freely given grace. No one can earn faith any more than one can earn friendship.

Faith is personal decision. Our faith will not remain without our effort. It is a leap that must be taken again and again. Every day one must say yes to God. It is an act of dedication to believe in the Holy Spirit and hence in the possible goodness of others and of oneself.

Faith, like any other gift, is not given apart from other people. Faith is something which we have in common. We believe together. Without faith in oneself and in others there is no faith in God.

Conclusion

For many people faith is a problem today. Yet the gospels show Jesus speaking more frequently of faith than of love. For with faith we have a certain security. This is what enabled Abraham and St Paul to face all the changes of their day. For a man of faith change is no threat. A man of faith is not frightened by anything outside himself. He has not only faith but hope and love.

FAITH AND DOUBT

Many people have been taught that it is always a sin to doubt their faith. Because of this oversimplified teaching they are often afraid to ask questions or face genuine difficulties. They have a certain type of faith, but it is childish and fragile, with little understanding and very easily threatened.

We must realize that it is necessary to ask questions and to face difficulties if our childhood faith is to grow to maturity. This necessary questioning and seeking understanding involves doubt. Therefore, all doubt in matters of faith is not sinful.

Dangers to Faith

Faith can be threatened by too much doubt. A person has little faith if he has a consistently negative outlook on life. It is difficult to see how someone is completely cynical about people, who trusts no one, can have genuine faith in God.

St. John reminds us that, "If anyone says that he loves God whom he cannot see but does not love his neighbour whom he can see, he is a liar". The same principle can be applied to faith.

On the other hand, faith can be threatened when people believe too much. When this happens, faith becomes superstition. The present-day popularity of fundamentalists' religions and occult groups seems to indicate that people today are believing too much rather than too little!

There is always a tendency in every generation to add to the simple Gospel message of Christ. How many Catholics take private revelations (Lourdes, Fatima, Montreal) more seriously than the gospel itself! Our faith will be endangered unless we are careful to maintain a critical attitude, always making the Gospel our final criterion.

Myths

Gregory Baum often points out that two myths have frequently been added to the Gospel. 1) The Church knows everything. 2) We are saved by obedience alone. Both of these myths are simply not true.

The Church does not know everything. We have from the Gospel a very few important and basic principles to teach us how to live humanly. The Church has no special knowledge or competence in the realm of science, history, philosophy, etc. Here, the Church like everyone else, has to depend on the competence of the best scholars in each field of study. When Church leaders have forgotten the limitations on the Church's knowledge, the results have been sad, to say the least. (e. g. Galileo) Belonging to the Church does not exempt us from the continual search for truth.

The myth about salvation by obedience alone, especially blind obedience, is equally false and harmful. It denies all that the New Testament tells us about the primacy of conscience and personal responsibility.

Faith and the Third Man

In 1966 a French sociologist, Francois Roustang wrote an article describing the present situation in the Catholic Church. He said that there are three different men or types of people in the Church. The first man is a conservative who prefers the pre-conciliar Church, who wants nothing to change in the Church. The second man is a Vatican II liberal who wants the Church updated and who feels that Vatican II has solved our problems. The third man is one who considers himself a Christian and a Catholic. He believes and practices the basic Gospel message but does not see how many of the traditional teachings and practices of Christianity fit in with the basic central message. Because he does not see their immediate relevance to his life, he simply ignores them.

Gregory Baum points out that there may be many Catholics today who fit into the "third man" phenomenon.

People in every century or generation have different problems. Therefore, when they read or listen to the Gospel with their particular problems in mind, they will find different answers. Each century or generation will focus on the Gospel in a different way. And around this central focus, each age will build its own synthesis of teaching and practice.

For example, perhaps two hundred years ago, the focus was on the concept of eternal life. It was all important. (Do this and that in order to gain eternal life. Don't do something else so as not to lose eternal life.) All other teachings and practices were synthesized around the central focus: eternal life.

Today the most serious problems in the world involve disunity and war: white versus black; rich versus poor; communist versus capitalist; the generation gap; religious disunity, etc. So today when we read the Gospel we focus on the human life of Jesus. He taught us how to live as human beings in peace and unity with other human beings.

The human life of Jesus is our new focus. But we have not yet made a total synthesis. We don't immediately see how all our traditional teachings and practices fit in with this new focus.

This lack of new synthesis explains why many sincere Christians can be "third man". They ignore many traditional practices and teachings simply because they cannot see their meaning and relevance. Yet they believe and are trying to practice the basic Gospel message.

What is most important is that our faith be open. We must never be afraid to ask questions or to face life with courage.

FAITH IN A SECULAR AGE

Is God Dead?

This simple question has rocked the modern world in the last few years. It has awakened Christians to re-examine the basic theological problem of the reality of God. No longer do Christians dismiss this question as impertinence or as ridiculous. God is no longer accepted by all Christians simply as a matter of course. Suddenly we have noticed that with the advancement of science, the sphere of influence of God is becoming narrower. At first we spoke of this phenomena as the “concealment” of God in our present age. Then quite suddenly the phrase, “absence of God” was heard in religious circles. Finally came the question: “Is God dead?”

For many people, the questioning of the reality of God, has strengthened their faith and given them a more realistic and mature Attitude to God. Many had to discard false images of God that had been taught or had constructed for themselves according to their own likeness. Others found that the traditional images of God they had received in their religious instructions were from another age, or culture, or worldview, and were meaningless or misleading to them in this North American culture in the 20th century.

False Gods

What are some of these false or inadequate images of God? Probably the most common false God that we allow to control us and which we must destroy is the “celestial cop”. Many people today believe in a god who drives around on his celestial motorcycle trying to find law breakers. Since everyone breaks laws, they live in constant fear and guilt. They fear that one of these days the “celestial cop” will catch up with them and give them the chair before they have a chance to get to confession.

How have we come to create such a false god? Most of us inherited this false god from our Irish or French mothers. How often have our parents corrected us by saying: “Don’t do that, that’s no good. God’s going to punish you if you do that”. This immediately instills fear in a child who looks upon God as a punisher of small children when they don’t keep his laws. This fear is very difficult to discard. Many adults have never outgrown this fear of God and many Catholics have been crippled by that terrible disease called scrupulosity.

This false image of God is often reinforced by paintings we may have seen as children of a great and powerful man, with a long white beard, and with lightening coming out of his finger. The Baltimore catechism also taught this false god. Remember the “eye in the triangle” with the inscription: “God sees you.” This eye watched you no matter where you hid. If you did something wrong, then this big eye would get you. Many preachers reinforced this false image of God by trying to instill fear in their hearers.

The scribes and Pharisees in the New Testament often described God as a divine policeman. They said Jesus was evil because he did not keep all the laws. How often Jesus kept breaking the law of the Sabbath. But Jesus confronted the Scribes and Pharisees. He called them whited coffins full of putrid decaying bones. Jesus told them that God was not a “celestial cop”, but he was like a father who loves us even when we turn against him. He is always faithful and ready to receive us back no matter what we have done. The parable of the Prodigal Son cannot be outdone in showing us this love and mercy of God.

Some may ask, “Don’t we have to have fear of God to keep us on the right road?” Fear is what keeps animals and slaves in line, e.g. those who have no faith, no hope and no love. But those who have faith, hope and love, no fear is necessary for love casts out fear. The only fear we should have is that we will not live up to our responsibilities as men and women and thus give up freedom.

What’s In A Name?

There are many other false images of God which we will not go into now. Rather, let us go to a more fundamental problem: Is any image of God adequate? Or, to put it another way; “How do we speak of God?” From the beginning, biblical faith has demanded that men do not make for themselves images of God. “Every image of God which men produce”, says Father G. Baum, “is to be rejected as idolatry”. Although biblical authors did speak of God in a descriptive way, “They firmly held that everything we say about God must be subjected to negative critique, spelling out how God is not like anything we know or say... God is ineffable. God cannot be named. A Christian cannot say precisely what God is like. A Christian can only say what God is not like. This is the inevitable situation of the biblical faith.” (G Baum, Windsor Star, May 29, 1968)

All the great philosophers, theologians and prophets are poets. They express themselves in the language of poetry – saying “is” when they mean “as if”. And all poets of whatever kind, have found it necessary at times to express their ideas in terms of symbol; the tools of their trade are the simile, the metaphor, the poetic image, the myth.

Thus Jesus himself spoke in parables, and would say, “the kingdom of heaven is like... e.g., a large fishing net; is like a banquet; like a man who sowed good seed in his field; like a mustard seed; like a hidden treasure; like a buyer looking for a fine pearl,” etc.

There are many other false, inadequate, and scrupulous images of God around. But let us go to a more fundamental problem at this point. Is any image of God adequate? Or, to put it another way: “How do we speak of God?” From the beginning the Bible demands that men do not make for themselves images of God. The Jews rejected every image of God which man produced as idolatry. The biblical authors did speak of God in a descriptive way, but they firmly held that everything said about God must be subjected to a negative critique. So that we can only spell out how God is not like

anything we know or say. God is ineffable – he cannot be named. Christians have also taught this doctrine but in practice have often forgotten it.

Thus, the only way biblical authors, theologians, and prophets can speak of God is in the language of poetry. They can only use “is” to mean “as if”. All poets, therefore, have found it necessary at times to express their ideas in terms of symbols. The tools of their trade are the simile, the metaphor, the poetic image, the myth.

Many eastern religious leaders have always realized this. Thus, many of them will spurn words in describing their religious experiences. Jesus himself spoke in parables, and would say, “the kingdom of heaven is like... e.g., a large fishing net; is like a banquet; like a man who sowed good seed in his field; like a mustard seed; like a hidden treasure; like a buyer looking for a fine pearl,” etc.

Today even modern physicists have been forced to leave language behind altogether, resorting instead to a complex mathematical symbolism - a form of myth if you will - which cannot be retranslated into words.

“Demythologizing”

It was Rudolph Bultmann who first came up with the concept of “demythologizing” the Bible. “To demythologize does not mean to debunk. On the contrary, a myth may represent an eternal truth - intuitively grasped perhaps - but the mode of expression will be dictated always by the world view of the men who lived in the age when the myth was promulgated, and it will reflect also that age’s level of knowledge and sophistication. Its language is metaphorical and anthropomorphic. The method of demythologizing probes for the deeper meaning hidden by the metaphor. ‘Its aim said Bultman, ‘is not to eliminate the mythological statements but to interpret them’.” (W. Braden, *LSD & God*, Bantam Book, 1968, p. 98).

Suppose then, said Bultman, that the authors of the Bible wanted to convey the idea of God’s transcendence they could do so only by resorting to the crude category of space - resulting in a God who is “up there” in a place called heaven. A more sophisticated age refined the vertical myth to connote a God who was not “up there” but “out there”, somewhere beyond the flashing comets. But again, this is a crude metaphor, and it no longer satisfies modern man. God is neither “up there” or “out there”. He is rather, in Bonhoeffer’s word “the beyond in the midst of our life”. And that is where we should seek him, in our midst. (Note: practical aspect of this in turning altars around in church.) Of course, for some, the expression “the beyond in the midst of life” does not mean anything. So, they must find some other figure of speech. (Cf. Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, p. 112)

The Secular Age.

We are now in the Secular Age. This is the age of the huge city, the Technopolis. It is an age of instant change and mobility. People are constantly on the move – they often move from one job to another; from one city to another, often they sleep in one city, work in another, and play in another. They have a vast amount of choices to make as to work, people they associate with, and entertainment.

It is an age of instant communications. With the help of television, people can sit in their home and watch a war being fought in Vietnam; a student demonstration in California; a country being invaded in Czechoslovakia; an assassination being committed in New York or Dallas; and a bomb threat in Montreal. With all this communication people learn more about their environment and about other people's ideas. Thus, we have pluralism where people of different races, nationalities, and religious beliefs live side by side.

The secular age is one of specialization. Life is now so complex that one man alone cannot be expected to know everything. The days of the universal man are over. The doctor, the teacher, the businessman, the theologian are all specialists. Thus, we have a differentiation of functions by using determined techniques.

The secular age is critical and scientific. Another way of saying that, is that the secular age is rational as opposed to traditional (or sacred). Nothing is too sacred to critically examine and study and discuss. Thus, the family, friendship, sex, money, death, work, and leisure, etc., are all fair game in discussions. Many people are no longer embarrassed to talk about sex in public. Young people, especially, are very open and outspoken on almost all aspects of life. Today, in the secular age, a word, a thing, is only accepted if it has significance, if it has something to say that is meaningful for my existence, or for the existence of humanity. A young man will not be a doctor because his father was one, he will be what he thinks he wants to be. Likewise, a young lady will not be a Catholic because her mother was one, but only if she thinks it means something to her nor will someone vote Liberal because “the family always voted that way”.

With this in mind it should be simple to see that a religion which was adopted for people who lived in an agricultural environment in the Middle Ages must be updated and re-translated for a secular age if it is not to be completely rejected.

The Future of Religion

It is risky to attempt to look into the future. Who could have foreseen the changes in the Catholic Church which have taken place in the past ten years? So obviously, at the present time, no one can predict with any degree of accuracy what the future of religion will be.

One thing we can predict is change, and perhaps radical change, will continue to take place in organized religion. The history of the church and the ups and downs of Israel's religion recorded in the Old Testament should convince us that change and religious belief and practice is the normal state of affairs.

From some of the trends now present in the churches we can make some guesses about the shape of future religion

An Open Church

"An extraordinary doctrinal development took place at Vatican II. The conciliar documents acknowledge in several contexts that the communion created by the Spirit in the Church includes other Christians and, beyond the baptismal covenant, other men, wherever they may be, who are open to the Spirit. In other words, Vatican II acknowledges a universal brotherhood of man which is, in scholastic terminology, supernatural. In regard to other Christians and their churches, the Decree on Ecumenism emphatically proclaims this supernatural brotherhood. The other churches "have not been deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation". Though perfect unity is lacking among us, Christian faith and baptism constitute a communion, a spirit created communion which no division of the churches can undo."

"While Vatican Council II reaffirms the historical character of the Catholic Church as the true Church of Christ, it also teaches us that the redemptive communion created by the spirit in this church, extends beyond the boundaries of the church to include other Christians and, beyond them, men called and chosen by the Spirit. In a strict theological sense, the Catholic Church is open ended. The Catholic Church has visible boundary lines, but these are not barriers to communion. They are open doors through which Catholics enjoy fellowship in the new life with other Christians and beyond. (Gregory Baum, The Ecumenist, Mar-Apr. 1968, p. 139)

More Pluralism

There is an increasing awareness that faith is very personal. This leads to a pluralism of belief even within particular denominations. In the Catholic Church, the Vatican Council makes it quite clear that the diversity in liturgy, customs, opinions, and even theology is quite normal and healthy. As Cardinal Leger said, "It would be a poor Church which has only one school of theology".

Changes In Structure

It seems likely that church structures will become less rigid and more democratic. In the Catholic Church collegiality, co-responsibility at all levels and subsidiarity are official teachings, even if they are not yet always honored in practice.

Father Gregory Baum foresees the future church taking more shape of a movement. Ties to the church will be looser. Membership will not be as clearly defined in a legal way as in the past. The movement will educate its members, create fellowship among them and direct them to the service of the whole of society.

Pentecostal and International

The Protestant theologian Harvey Cox predicts that all Christian religions will, or at least should become more Pentecostal and Catholic. By being more Pentecostal, he means that religion should give people an occasion to express themselves emotionally. More active participation in folk masses etc. seems to be meeting this need.

Harvey Cox also thinks that we need the Roman Catholic emphasis that the Church is first of all an international community and that our loyalty as Christians is first, to a community that transcends national boundaries. The Church of the future must be one that announces a new human community. This attitude would avoid the abuses which result from narrow nationalism

Church as Gadfly

Many theologians point out today that Christians should never completely accept any form of government or system such as communism or capitalism. Christians should be like the prophets of Israel who had the courage to point out to Kings and governments the evils of their society. Modern day prophets of this kind would be persons such as civil rights activists like Martin Luther King Jr., Father James Edmund Groppi; etc.

The Anonymous Christian

Organized religion seems to have little appeal for many people today, especially young people. More and more Catholics find themselves "third men". The institutional churches are too slow moving and have lost their credibility for many people.

Yet many of these people, though professing little or no allegiance to any church, are living by genuine human and Christian values. In the midst of their doubt and darkness, their lived faith can still be very real

"Yet when all is said and done, only he will understand this message of the possibility of Christian belief today and tomorrow who not only listens to it but also practices it and gives himself to it in his very existence by prayer. This means having the courage to speak into that silent immensity which yet lovingly embraces us - with a will to trust oneself to it and with the belief that one has been accepted by this Holy Mystery we call God.

“This one achieves by taking pains to remain true to the demanding voice of conscience, by facing up to the questions of life, to the one silent, all embracing questions of one's existence, and by not running away from it but calling to it accepting it as a mystery of infinite love...

“Hence, when we say that one should learn from the experience of one's life whether Christianity is the truth of life, this does not demand anything which is beyond us. It simply tells us: ally yourself with what is genuine, with the challenging, with what demands everything, with the courage to accept the mystery within you. It simply tells us: go on, wherever you may find yourself at this particular moment, follow the light even though it is as dim; guard the fire even though it burns low as yet; call out to the mystery precisely because it is incomprehensible. Go and you will find - hope, and hope is already blessed interiorly with the grace of fulfillment.

“Anyone who sets out in this manner maybe far from the officially constituted Christianity he may feel like an atheist you may think fearfully that he does not believe in God; Christian teaching and conduct of life may appear strange and almost oppressive to him. But he should go on and follow the light shining in the innermost depths of his heart.

“The path has already arrived at the goal. The Christian is not afraid that he will not arrive, even though such a questioner and seeker did not succeed during his lifetime to give perfect expression to his anonymous Christianity in the explicit Christianity of the Church, and to integrate it into that explicit Christianity. It is no philosophical but a Christian truth that one who seeks, has already been found by the One for whom, perhaps without knowing his name, but with hopeful courage and sincerity, he searches.

“How blessed all this is: it is not so easy to run past the infinite Mystery, which embraces us in silent love, as the sceptic and the atheist, as well as the narrow-minded amongst Christians, may think, for they think of God too much in the image of their puny hearts”. (Karl Rahner, “Thoughts on the Possibility of Belief Today”, Theological Investigations, vol. V).

PART TWO

SACRAMENTS WITHOUT MAGIC

THE SACRAMENTS

Traditional Approach

A sacrament is an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace. There are seven sacraments. None of these can be “substantially” changed. Every sacrament is made up of “matter” and “form”. All the sacraments give “sacramental grace” and some even give “sanctifying grace” or an increase of “sanctifying grace”. All the sacraments work “ex opere operato” as well as “ex opera operantis”. Sometimes the sacraments are “valid” but “illicit” ...

In the last couple of decades, there have been tremendous new insights into sacramental theology. It is no longer necessary to present the sacraments in this legal and materialistic manner. For in this approach, often too much emphasis is placed on externals and not enough on interior meaning and disposition. If the sacraments are looked upon merely as things (or rites and ceremonies to be performed) then there is a great danger that they become magic.

Personalist Approach

The personalist approach emphasizes the personal and social aspect of the sacraments and the “sign” or symbolic value involved. According to this approach the people present are more important than the things to be done. Thus, a sacrament is seen as a celebration of people in joy because they are experiencing or helping each other to experience an interior and meaningful growth and their relationship to God and to one another

“The sacrament does not work, so to speak, automatically, independently of the inner attitude of man. The holiness of the minister is not of decisive importance, but the faith and goodwill of the recipient of the sign play an indispensable part. The sacrament is an encounter with the Lord, and there cannot be an encounter on one side only. The sacrament is an affirmation that the Lord is faithful. But without us he can do nothing”. (The New Catechism, p. 254).

Institution of the Sacraments

In order to show that the sacraments are not arbitrary ceremonies, the Church has insisted that the sacraments were instituted by Christ. But what does this mean? It is obvious from history that the sacraments have changed considerably through the centuries, e.g. Penance, Marriage, Confirmation, etc. It is also fairly safe to say that Jesus did not give the disciples a mini course in sacramental theology. Nor did Jesus

write a book of rubrics concerning the celebration of the sacraments. How then did Jesus institute the sacraments?

Jesus instituted the sacraments by living a human life. He was born a man, ate and drank, knew the need of human warmth and friendship, knew the need to renew his commitment to his Father, and he knew and experienced to an extreme degree the agony of suffering till death. He asked that his followers live their lives “in memory” of him. The early Christians, then, remembering the life of Jesus, recalled his promise to be with them “all days till the end of time.” They reasoned that if he was with them at all times, he must certainly be with them at the important moments of life; at birth and death, at times of repentance and forgiveness, and their coming together for mutual support and encouragement, etc. Since these are special moments in life, they were celebrated and accompanied by special ceremonies. At these celebrations people not only talked about their joyful experiences but acted them out in symbols and signs (in mystery, as the early Christians put it). This is what Jesus himself did at the Last Supper and when he entered the river Jordan to be baptized, etc. The sacraments, then, are ceremonies to celebrate with the community what is taking place at special times in our lives. They are signs that remind us and reassure us that Jesus is with us with his spirit of love and mercy and with the rest of our brothers and sisters in the community, the Church.

The Church as Sacrament

Man has always managed to see signs of God in his human experiences. The ancient Hebrews looked upon creation and their freedom from slavery as signs that God is a creator who loves freedom. In Jesus, the early Christians saw God as a person who is merciful and full of love. St. John calls Jesus the word made flesh or the sign of God in the flesh, in person.

Jesus, then, is the sign or sacrament of God. He not only symbolizes the goodness and love of God but actually bestows it on people. Therefore, men hoped in Jesus and became his followers. Their concern was and is to continue the work of Jesus, to continue bringing hope and faith to others by living lives of love and concern. These Christians are the people of God, the church. They are the sacrament of Christ. They are the sign that Jesus and his message still lives in the world. Thus, whenever people are gathered together in unity and friendship, we have the sign or sacrament that God is love giving people something to live for. In summary, the Church is THE sacrament, the great sign that Jesus lives and there is hope. The seven sacraments are merely more explicit and concrete manifestations of the great sacrament

Conclusion on the Sacraments

1. The sacraments are not magic. Without the faith and the goodwill of the recipient they are meaningless.
2. All the sacraments can be received by desire except Marriage and Holy Orders. God's love and mercy are not limited to sacramental rites and ceremonies. God acts wherever people are.
3. Catholics do not have a monopoly on the sacraments. They are often celebrated in other churches and even existed in some way in the Old Testament.
4. Catholic priests may legitimately be excused from priestly functions and even get married. This does not minimize the sacraments they once celebrated nor the holiness of their lives.

BAPTISM

Symbolism of Baptism

Many people think that the metaphor of washing sums up all the teaching on Baptism. The purpose of this sacrament, they will immediately answer, is to cleanse us from original sin. Its outward sign is a bodily wash, done to symbolize the spiritual washing of the soul. This is a very impoverished view of Baptism. Not merely does it fail to do justice to the purpose and effect of the sacrament, but it also gives a most inadequate account of its symbolism.

“Like all great symbols of mankind, water has a double significance, meaning both salvation and destruction. Water does not just signify life, it also signifies the deluge; along with drinking, washing and swimming it can mean drowning... This symbolism is clearest when baptism is performed by immersion, as in the East. The ‘old man’, man imprisoned by egoism, licentiousness, laxity, blindness, pride and obstinacy, is given over to death. He dies and vanishes, along with Christ’s death. This means primarily... the forgiveness of sin. But it also means a transformation of life.” (A New Catechism, p.246).

The Non-Baptized

“The unbaptized make contact with Jesus in any case by the fact that they have been born. They have Jesus as their fellowman. The Church is convinced that if they are men of good will they share in the blessings of Jesus’ redemption. Loyalty to their task in life, service to the end, baptizes them with the baptism with which Jesus was baptized. When an unbaptized person is put to death because of Jesus, explicitly, he is said to have received the baptism of blood. In other cases, there is baptism of desire, which can include unconscious desires. Everyone who is prepared to be ‘obedient unto death’ is touched by Christian baptism. This ‘baptism of the unbaptized’, however, is not purely interior. It is readiness to serve which is expressed in the whole of their lives and in their death.” (A New Catechism, p. 249).

Unbaptized Infants

“There was great uncertainty in the Church for a long time as regards the fate of unbaptized infants, because theologians consider the necessity of the baptism of water too exclusively from the viewpoint of its individual importance... In the course of centuries, the Church has drawn on the ancient treasures of the faith to elaborate such reasons. It has become more and more clearly convinced that three truths must be borne in mind if the question is to be properly solved. The first is that God wills all should attain eternal blessedness. This certainty includes children, who are seen in the Gospel as the special object of God’s love. The second truth is that Christ was born and died for all. And, finally, we know that no one is lost except for sins which he has personally committed. In view of these truths, there must be a way by which unbaptized

infants are saved. We do not know exactly how. But we know in any case that they are in Christ". (A New Catechism, p. 251-2).

Conclusion

A New Catechism points out that, "it is important not to isolate baptism and envisage it only as something individual and momentary which takes place between God and the soul. As soon as the baptism of water is taken out of the whole great context, strange problems arise, as the history of the Church has shown. Just as the hand is only really a hand in the totality of the body, so too baptism is only a genuine sign of Christ in the totality of our life and death, the totality of Christian upbringing, of the fellowship of the Church and of mankind" (p. 252).

Penance

There is no room for fear in approaching the sacrament of Penance. This sacrament was never meant to make us scrupulous, never meant to have us focus all our attention on ourselves in a cruel torturous self analysis. Rather it is to console us in our weakness with the realization that the love and forgiveness of God knows no limits. The parable of the Prodigal Son teaches us that we can come to the forgiving Father and to the forgiving community secure that God's love for us never ceases. Perhaps the following brief points on the evolution and clarification of this sacrament will help those who may have difficulty with the sacrament of Penance.

Historical Evolution

It is thought by expert theologians that private sacramental Penance as we have it now did not exist before the seventh century. Instead, they believe that all there existed was "Public Penance". So that the faithful could receive the sacrament of penance once only in his lifetime and this was done in public and often took several years. Hence for greater security, Christians were led to postpone its reception until they were on their deathbed. On the other hand, it was used only for particular serious sins (murder, adultery, and apostasy) while for sins of less gravity they were content with the "daily penance" (arms, fasts, and prayers).

From the seventh to the tenth centuries, there was "Tariffed Penance". This was of Irish origin which later spread throughout the Christian west. Sins we're confessed to a priest in private and a penance was imposed according to a "tariff" laid down in the "Penitential Books", a scale of charges, so to speak, corresponding to the gravity of the sins confessed and consisting of alms, prolonged prayers, and fasts. This "tariffed" sacramental Penance could be repeated at need.

After the tenth century, detailed confession of sins assumed greater importance in the sacrament of Penance. At the Council of Trent many detailed norms were laid down concerning the manner of confessing sins, specifying the number of times, species and circumstances. People became so concerned with the telling or confessing of sins that the sacrament became known as "Confession". Thus, the sacrament of Penance became very external, automatic, and painful for many Christians. However, in the last few years less emphasis is placed on the "confessing" and more on interior disposition. Often people will go to the priest's office instead of the "confessional" and will merely talk about their problem instead of enumerating sins. At other times the sacrament of Penance is celebrated "communally" in the Church in order to bring out the social aspect of this sacrament. Still the private concealed manner of the sacrament of Penance is available for those who prefer to remain unknown by the priest.

Brief Clarification on the Sacrament of Penance

1. The sacrament of Penance is not the only means of forgiveness. God's compassion and mercy are not limited to sacramental Penance. God forgives man as soon as he turns back to him and repents of his sins (Hence, the recommendation to seek forgiveness as soon as possible). Man is forgiven by acts of love, by prayers, alms, and the sacrifice of the Mass. The sacrament of Penance is a concrete sign of reassurance of God's forgiveness.
2. The sacrament of Penance does not depend on mere external absolution but on the inner conversion of the heart. The important thing in the sacrament of Penance it is not the confessing of sins only but sorrow and sincere amendment.
3. The sacrament of Penance it's not purely an individual thing. Sin no matter how secret or private represents a personal alienation from the Christian community. Therefore, the forgiveness experienced in this sacrament is the forgiveness of God and of the entire Christian community.
4. The sacrament of Penance should be the occasion of joy rather than fear. It is a sign of reassurance that God is merciful and compassionate. We rejoice in the knowledge that our brothers who recognized their own sinfulness forgive us in Christ for our sinfulness, and we are happy because the whole Christian community rejoices in Christ in our conversion.
5. One does not have to go to the sacrament of Penance before every communion, nor every week, month, or year. The only time one must go to the sacrament is before receiving Communion when living in serious sin (Even if one is forgiven by God, the Church insists on forgiveness from the community since man is a social being). However, there are exceptions to this law as in all other laws, e.g.no priest to give absolution, danger of being revealed, extreme embarrassment, etc.
6. The frequency of celebrating the sacrament of Penance depends on each individual's needs. "Some Catholics have the habit of receiving the sacrament frequently. If this is a result of anxieties, it is not advisable. But if it is due to a desire to meet Christ as the Lord who forgives, frequent confession can be a very evangelical practice. But individuals or religious houses should not be compelled to adopt this habit, especially as we are now clearer about other modes of forgiveness in the church". (A New Catechism, p.459)

CHANGES IN THE MASS

History of the Mass

During the time of the Apostles, Christians gathered for worship not in a large building or church (they had been expelled from the temple) but in someone's home or basement. This original form of gathering for Mass continued for a short time as long as the congregations were very small, but after the persecutions when the Church and State joined forces, Mass was moved out of private homes into large public buildings.

In the Middle Ages, towns vied with one another in building magnificent cathedrals and basilicas many of which are still standing today. In these large churches the table was replaced by large marble altars. These altars were often placed at the end of these large buildings by a wall in a large sanctuary where the priests and monks sat. Eventually only the monks near the altar could make out what the celebrant at Mass was saying and so they formed the choir which made the response for the people.

Spectators' Mass

The people at Mass became spectators. They would go to Church to see the show put on by the priests and monks who wore very ornate robes and sang beautiful music as they "acted out the drama of Calvary." The people would listen to the music and look at the paintings on the ceilings and walls in order to keep their minds "on heavenly things."

The languages in Europe began to develop and change. At first the mass was in Greek, the language of the people. Then Latin was also used when Christianity spread to the West. But then the people in Europe began to speak French, German, English, etc. However, at this point the Mass remained in Latin and so only those who were educated and spoke Latin could understand it. The people could no longer hear nor understand the priest directing worship. A point was reached, therefore, when a complete break took place between the priest at the altar and the people. The people made up their own private prayers and devotions. Instead of saying the prayers of the Mass they would say prayers to their favorite saint. They set up statues with shrines and different parts of the church where they could have their own private devotions. The rosary took on a great importance at this time.

Active Participation

The bishops of the world and the Pope gathered in Rome for the Vatican Council II. Here they proclaimed that the Mass does not belong to the priest but also to the people. The Council passed laws for priests to say the prayers at Mass in the language of the people instead of in Latin. The large altars were replaced by modest tables where the priest prayed facing the people. The people were encouraged to come closer to the table of sacrifice had to take part in the communion meal. The prayers were changed so that the people could understand them better. The people could now listen to the words of Jesus and the apostles in the readings. Many frills added in the Middle Ages were

dropped. The priests were advised to have as their main concern the active participation of the people

Why Go To Mass?

All these changes in the Mass are to bring us back to the real purpose of celebrating the Mass. Why, then, do we go to mass?

We do not go to Mass in order to say our own private prayers and to be alone with God. We can do this much better in the privacy of our room where there are no distractions, no crowds, no getting dressed up and going out, etc. We come to church on Sunday not to be alone with God but to be together with God. We come in order to pray and worship God as a group, as a community, as a parish, as friends, united in the bonds of Christian love.

At Mass we come together not to watch some thing but in order to be together, to support one another, to encourage one another, and help one another to live good Christian lives. Our gathering at Mass is a sign of our unity and love. Anyone who is not trying to grow in love does not belong at Mass.

If the mass does not help us to grow in love and respect for one another then there is something seriously wrong with our coming together. It can mean that we are either merely going through a routine of mere external formalism and that we do not mean what we say when we pray or else it means that we are living lives of unconcern and sin and do not intend to change our ways. It is good to remember the words of Jesus before Mass; "If you are about to offer your gift to God at the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar and go at once to make peace with your brother; then come back and offer your gift to God." (Mt. 5, 23-24)

Brief Clarification on Mass and Communion

1. The Mass is a banquet meal. We do not go to a banquet and refuse to eat. If we are trying to live a good life and are not at enmity with God, we should celebrate our unity with the others by taking part in communion at each celebration of the Mass.
2. The fast has been reduced to one hour before Communion. This is to encourage us to take part in this spiritual nourishment. If one has forgotten or has good reason for eating, then Communion should not be omitted.
3. Communion is now possible under both species of bread and wine for all and is often distributed in a variety of ways according to local customs. If one does not wish to receive under the species of wine, there is never any obligation to do so. One should not be afraid to hold the chalice in one's hands or take the bread with

one's fingers. A person's fingers are no less sacred than his tongue. It is an error to think that Christ is physically present in the bread or wine and that Christ is therefore handled and carried about. Christ is truly present sacramentally or in mystery as the Church has taught throughout the centuries, but the forms of bread and wine still remain.

4. If one cannot go to Mass on Sunday because of sickness or for very good reasons, then one is excused from the Church's law. It is recommended to sometimes have a special family gathering around the dinner table where the unity and love of the family are deepened and strengthened. This is a type of Mass and Communion which are very necessary and sometimes more beneficial than a church service.
5. It is now possible to have the priest come and celebrate Mass in a more informal way in one's home. This is often an ideal way to worship since the size of the gathering is small and the community is more united in love and friendship.
6. The effect of a Mass cannot be measured mathematically. However interior attention and emotion are required for real worship and for growth in love to take place. The mass is not a substitute for concern and love of neighbor. Mass is hypocrisy and meaningless when there is no concern for one's neighbor
7. Masses cannot be bought. Stipends are given to pay for the materials used at mass and the services rendered by the priest, choir, etc. Although a mass can be celebrated for one's intention it is better for people to offer the Mass themselves than to have a priest or someone else do it for them. The Mass does not belong to the priest, nor to the one who gives a stipend, but to all who are gathered around the table of worship.

MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

A New Vision

The Vatican Council II has given us a new vision of marriage and the family, a most encouraging and up-lifting vision. A careful reading of the document is a real revelation to most people. The change in terminology in these documents, especially in the document of The Church in the Modern World is most significant because it indicates a change in attitude, a new vision for marriage and the family. There is a change from “contract” to “covenant” (friendship) from “justice” to “love” from “rights and duties” to “fidelity on both sides”, and from “biological love” to “personal love”.

The emphasis is taken off “primary and secondary” ends of marriage. These terms are neatly avoided. More emphasis is placed on education as well as procreation. Mutual love is treated as an equally essential part of marriage rather than as a secondary end.

Marriage is no longer judged solely on the correctness or biological or physical love between the two partners. Accent is on responsible parenthood rather than simply on parenthood. More than ever before it is clear that spouses and parents must take on the responsibilities of their lives themselves. They must look to the Church for guidance and accept directives, but they must make their own decisions in faith and love. They must not be looking for answers from priests in all the details of their lives.

Communication in Marriage

Communication is a form of nourishment essential to growth and indeed to survival. It means guarding against all tendency to close in upon oneself, against all desire to fortify oneself against love, to capture others for the sake of self. In community, I must give myself to the other; I must realize him, and he must realize me.

To be responsible means to be able to respond. This ability to respond presupposes a certain openness to others best expressed by the word “presence”. Presence is bound up with openness and acceptance. The person who is open is free to seek reality in the other. He can leave himself, his immediate concern and be with the other.

Unless a person has a clear image of himself or herself, he or she will have a difficult time knowing other people as they really are. When a person is comfortable with himself or herself, is able to accept self, to love self, then he or she has the ability to respond.

In marriage, as in all communication, there is a great need to respect the individual. This implies an openness which both reveals the self and accept the other. Such openness is not easily achieved. To be open is to be hurt. But it is also to be in a position to be healed. The open person has learned to receive and this requires a far deeper sensitivity and reverence than just giving.

“Love is the only way to grasp another human being in the innermost core of his personality. No one can become fully aware of the very essence of another human being unless he loves him. By the spiritual act of love, he is enabled to see the essential traits and features in the beloved person; and even more, he sees that which is potential in him, that which is not yet actualized but yet ought to be actualized. Furthermore, by his love, the loving person enables the beloved person to actualize these potentiality's. By making him aware of what he can be and of what he should become, he makes those potentialities come true... Love is as primary a phenomenon as sex. Normally, sex is a mode of expression for love. Sex is justified, even sanctified, as soon as, but only as long as, it is a vehicle of love. Thus, love is not understood as a mere side effect of sex but sex as a way of expressing the experience of that ultimate togetherness that is called love.” (Victor Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning, pp. 176-177).

The Generation Gap

A child is a human being, a person, even if, as with an infant of a week old, his human quality is still hidden in the chaos of his elementary experiences of life. Whatever his age may be, the child is already a person and should be considered as such. From a purely human point of view, he has a right to the greatest respect.

Parents do not “own” a child (we own objects or things). A child is a person who has his own destiny in God's plan. Sometimes parents are reluctant to allow children to grow up to be autonomous, independent human beings. Other parents may allow their children to “run wild” without providing any guidance for them. And still others may be too demanding and too strict on their children. St. Paul in one of his epistles had this to say, “Children, your duty is to obey your parents, for at your age this is one of the best things you can do to show your love for God. Fathers (he could just as well have said mothers or parents) do not over-correct your children, are they will grow up feeling inferior and frustrated”. (Col. 3, 20).

A Plea to Parents

“Sir: Thank you for the excellent essay ‘On Being An American Parent’ (Dec15). Oh, how I wish every parent and future parent would read it and take it to heart!

“You quoted the Beatles, John Lennon and Paul McCartney, with the line, ‘We gave her everything money could buy.’ What about a following line, ‘Fun is the one thing money can't buy.’

“I love my parents and I know they love me, but they've ruined my life. Your paragraph under ‘Listen’ very well sums up what I'm trying to say. I could never tell my parents anything, it was always ‘I'm too busy... too tired... that's not important... that's stupid... can't you think of better things... oh, your friends are wrong... they're stupid’. As a result, I stopped telling my parents anything. All communication ceased. We never had that very important thing – fun.

“Oh, we had love. Prompted on my side by an ever-present fear of my mother and pity for my father, and prompted on their side by the thought that I was their responsibility and if I went wrong, they would be punished by God.

‘After four rotten years in a Catholic girl’s school (I did have two or three wonderful teachers) I’m now stuck in an even worse Catholic women’s college. Only the best for me. They knew I didn’t want to come but they made me anyway. Their daughter wasn’t going to be corrupted. I had already been saved from the evils of early dating and doing things that ‘everyone else’ did.

“What is the result of this excellent upbringing? I’m 18 years old, drink whenever I get the chance, have smoked pot, and as of a very eventful Thanksgiving vacation, am no longer a virgin. Why? Was it my parents or just me? I’m so confused - but who can I talk to? Not my parents. My parents could read this and never dream it was their daughter.

“I have only one important plea to parents... Listen, Listen and Listen again. Please, I know the consequences and I’m in hell. “A College Student, Ohio” (Open Letter, Time, Dec 22, 1967).

PART THREE
CONSCIENCE AND THE NEW MORALITY

THE NEW MORALITY

Why do we keep hearing about the new morality? Some people are disturbed because the moral issues that are raised today are often not the moral issues of yesterday. With all the crime and disorders we are experiencing, some people will argue that this new morality is not working. What was wrong with the old Church laws and the ten commandments?

The Ten Commandments

Jesus did not seem to be satisfied with the ethics based on the ten commandments. With the possible exception of the early Puritans, there has never been a group more loyal to the ten commandments than the scribes and pharisees. Jesus on the other hand condemned these people and gave us a new commandment. This new commandment is love.

“The commandment of love is beyond human forces. Self-preservation and self-interest often remain our profoundest motives, deeper than our love. Nevertheless, we must love our neighbor ‘as ourselves’, that is, but the same energy that we put into self-preservation. Hence the law of love knows no limits. We can never say we have accomplished it.” (A New Catechism, p. 379).

The Law of Christ

The law of Christ is the law of love. If we love, we wish to do only what is good. Love is enough because it is everything. It is true that to help us, and guide us, there are other commandments in the preaching of Christ and the Church. But they do not come to stand beside love. They are rather directives and guideposts for the purity of love. They are hints or reminders to help us apply the law of love. St. Paul never suggests that it is by keeping on the right side of the line which he sketches that his readers will find salvation and peace with God. The logic is quite different. The Christian has been given salvation and peace with God as a totally undeserved gift. He cannot earn it. His whole duty is to make his life an act of free and joyful thanksgiving.

Too Difficult

Charles Curran (“The Ethical Teaching of Jesus” Commonweal, Nov.24, 1967) points out that at first glance, this law of love may seem simple, too general. But when we think about it, Jesus tells us to love one another AS he has loved us. He goes on to tell us to love our enemies, to do good to those who hate and persecute us. And if that is not enough, he tells us that there is no greater love than to lay down our lives for our friends. He wishes us to leave all things to follow him. He goes so far as to tell us to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. These moral demands of Jesus are quite radical. Who can say, “I have kept these from my youth”? Can anyone truly live the Christian life? How can a Christian not worry about what he is going to eat or drink? How can a Christian priest or minister say to an improvident father that he should not worry about food, clothing, and shelter for his family? Can I as a Christian stand by and

turn the other cheek when an innocent people (e.g. young children) are being attacked? Can I possibly give to everyone who asks? Surely this law of Christ is not for the mediocre. It is a real challenge which can never be fully met by any of us here and now.

No Security

Until very recently, Catholic theology and life forgot about the law of love and the consequent call for continual growth and perfection. We were happy to have a lot of DON'TS to observe. As long as we stayed away from these DON'TS, we felt secure. We had absolute norms which we could keep to the letter. This provided us with a false sense of security. As long as we did not "fall" into mortal sin we were secure. Instead of asking, "How can I grow in the love of God and my neighbor?" or "What return can I make for all God has done for me?" we rather often asked, "How far can I go before I commit a mortal sin? How far can I go before I lose my love for God?"

But since Vatican Council II, we are beginning to realize that it is not only the duty of priests and religious to try to live the law of love and to try to be perfect. All of us who wish to call ourselves Christian are called to perfection. There is no longer any security in merely observing certain DON'TS and certain laws. The responsibility of growth is our own and there is no limit to this growth.

The New Morality

The "new morality" can mean many things to different people. But the new morality we are outlining here is not really new. It is as old as the teaching of Jesus to love one another. The only thing that is new about it is that we are beginning to emphasize it once more. We are beginning to realize that the observance of a few DON'TS is not worthy of a Christian. A true Christian can never say, "I've done enough. I've done my duty." He has never done enough but it is always open more and more to the call of God and his brother. There is always the need to grow more and more in the love of God and of our brother. The inability to completely fulfill this law of Jesus is a constant reminder of our need for God's mercy and forgiveness.

All the old securities and certitudes are gone. The Christian as a pilgrim travelling to the new heaven and the new earth never has the luxury and security of one who has already arrived at his final destination. It is only his faith and hope that sustains him in his growth as he stumbles and falls on the way to Christian maturity.

Change in Church Laws

Since Vatican II Catholics have become used to the fact that many church laws are changing. Many are disturbed, however, at the fact that even traditional moral laws are being examined more closely and questioned. Some fear that if there is the slightest change in one area the floodgates of total permissiveness are opened.

However, St Thomas and Catholic theology since his time have taught that laws are reasonable rules for the good of the community. They are not simply arbitrary

commands. (In other words, something is commanded because it is good; it is not good simply because it is commanded). Therefore, it is perfectly legitimate to ask the reason for any particular moral law.

This is exactly what is going on today. Each moral problem is being examined afresh. In some cases, the original reasons for a law may no longer be valid and so the law is changed. In other cases, the law may be retained but for quite different reasons.

It is important to remember that moral theology is an inexact science. Mathematical certitude and precision are neither possible nor possible in the realm of morality. We must not expect to find neat, clear, black and white answers to all moral problems. We should also realize that eternal, last word, once and for all time answers to most moral problems are simply not possible. Very often the best we can do is to use our present knowledge and experience to come to a provisional solution.

Summary of Principles Underlying the New Morality

1. The importance of the person: The unique value of the person in Christian belief ("Man is not made for the Sabbath but the Sabbath for man) makes present day moralists more ready to make exceptions to general laws when observance to the letter would obviously harm a particular individual. On the other hand actions which directly harm other persons are seen as the worst sins.
2. Social justice: Individual failings are considered much less important than indifference to the great social problems of war, poverty, and racial injustice
3. Natural Law: Catholics used to think that the solution to most moral problems were self-evident from the "natural law". Now scholars recognize that very few moral principles are so obvious that they are self-evident. "Do good and avoid evil" is admitted by everyone. But the solution to complex moral problems is not so self-evident and there may be many different and equally valid attempts to solve them. Generally, today any consideration from the point of view of natural law emphasize the fully human personal and psychologically mature as being "natural" and not merely the biological or physical.
4. Conversion and gradual growth: There has been in the past a too rigid treatment of people with too little recognition of the fact that individuals are at many different stages of development. The young and the weak were expected to measure up to the highest ideals. On the other hand, people could become smug in their keeping of the rules. Now there is more awareness that each of us grows gradually, step by step, by a process of conversion. God is patient with each one of us no matter what stage of development he is at. (Consider God's patience with the people of the Old Testament and how slowly and gradually he led them). The old maxim: "do what you can and pray for what you cannot do," should be always kept in mind. As long as a person is willing to do this, there is no doubt about his goodwill.
5. Theology of compromise: Because of the ever-present existence of sin and weakness in this less than ideal world we often have to settle, at least

temporarily, for less than perfect solutions. In other words, we must take the whole situation into account and accept the lesser of two evils

6. New appreciation of neglected principles: A good example of this is the primacy of conscience. Catholic moral theology always taught this in theory. The Canadian bishops applied it practically in the difficult area of birth control.

SIN

What is Sin?

Traditionally we have thought of sin in terms of law. Most older catechisms define sin as, "an offence against the law of God or of the Church." Properly understood this is not a bad definition. But it tends to be too abstract and vague and can give the impression that God makes laws for no special reason but simply in an arbitrary way.

A better definition of sin centers on the person. Sin is something I do or refrain to do which in some way hurts myself or other people. This makes it clear that the laws of God and the Church are not arbitrary commands. If there is a law which forbids a certain way of acting it is because that way of acting will sooner or later hurt other people or the person himself who acts that way.

This second definition of sin also reminds us that the love of God and the love of other people cannot be separated. In the words of St. John "If anyone says that he loves God whom he cannot see but does not love his neighbor whom he can see, he is a liar" (1 Jn. 4, 20).

Sin is an Inner Attitude

Since only God knows the state of man's heart and mind, and his basic attitude, we cannot judge by externals alone. The evil of sin must be stressed in terms of the selfish rejection of God, of others, and of our freedom as sons of God. It is conceivable that a man "in grace" can commit "sins". Isolated actions do not necessarily change our basic attitude or relationship to God. This explains more clearly than ever the traditional teaching of the church that only God can judge a man.

Mortal and Venial Sin

The sharp division between mortal and venial sin was very useful in educating people and elevating the moral level of mankind. But it has its disadvantages. For a person can become so preoccupied with it that the attention becomes exclusively fixed on the action while little heed is taken of the attitude of the heart. Yet the inner attitude, as Jesus said, is the real source of all evil (Cf. Mark 7, 14-23).

A mentality overzealous for the exact cataloging of sins can easily lead to scrupulosity. On the other hand, it can lead to a "How far can I go before I commit mortal sin?" attitude which is the antithesis of Christian generosity.

"In mortal sin, the inner attitude is the will to break with God as he is encountered in our fellow man and in our conscience. It is a serious break with God, which does not merely mean hatred of him, but also the refusal of something which is essential for faithfulness and love... We must not be too ready to think that this has happened in any particular case. Mortal sin is no trifle. If one starts to turn minor matters into mortal sins, one ends up by turning mortal sins into minor matters" (A New Catechism p. 453)

We can say that a man definitely did wrong or is wrong in the light of the church's teaching but we cannot accuse any man of sin.

This approach to sin does not give ready comfort and assurance to most people because they are conditioned to black and white answers. But black and white answers are not the "truth". The challenge of personal responsibility and personal choice is great, but it does carry the reassurance that an honest decision is a guarantee of God's life and love.

Stress is therefore on the love of God and the way Christ taught us to express that love through the love of neighbor.

Sin in the Twentieth Century

"Can we make any sense whatever out of the traditional idea of sin today? I would suggest that the terms in our contemporary vocabulary which comes closest to what the Bible means by sin is 'apathy' or perhaps 'sloth'.

"Sin is not a popular theological subject today, and when it comes to teaching us what it is really all about, our two best instructors in recent years have not been theologians, but Hannah Arendt and James Baldwin. Arendt's portrait of Adolf Eichmann, "Eichmann in Jerusalem, subtitled 'A Study in the Banality of Evil', despite some justifiable criticisms of it, remains a graphic portrayal of sin in the 20th century - monstrous crimes perpetuated by insipid sad-sacks. It terrifies us because Eichmann is so overpoweringly ordinary, so like us. As his featureless face gradually takes form in Arendt's pages, he is disclosed as the kind of spectacle polishing milquetoast with whom we would be bored after ten minutes if we had to sit next to him on a commuter train. Incapable of Luciferian evil, we could all commit genocide just by getting to work on time and keeping our noses clean.

"If Arendt dismantles our prevailing images of sin by introducing us to dolt-as-deathmonger, Baldwin performs the same service inversely by seeing in the Negro militant the saint-as-revolutionary... Baldwin gets to us because he opens our eyes to the saints among us. And they are not the other worldly - self-effacing saints of the religious bookstores but angry hotheads, impetuous activists impatiently pursuing social change and spiritual wholeness. In providing us with a new model of religious obedience, Baldwin has also exposed the criminal sinfulness of law-abiding complacency and inactivity" (Harvey Cox, *God's Revolution and Man's Responsibility*, pp. 39-41).

CONSCIENCE

Freedom and Responsibility

A deeper understanding of the dignity of the human person and the respect that men should have for each other regardless of colour, creed, or culture has grown in the last decade. The Vatican Council echoing the United Nations, and the constitution of many countries, has proclaimed the religious freedom of all men.

“The Church therefore is being faithful to the truth of the gospel, and is following the way of Christ and the apostles when she recognizes, and gives support to, the principle of religious freedom befitting the dignity of men as being in accord with divine revelation” (#12 Religious Freedom).

Freedom is essential for a person’s growth and development into a mature adult Christian. The twofold basis for human freedom is man's creation in the image and likeness of God and Christ's redemption. Freedom, however, is not absolute but must respect the freedom of others and be guided by love.

Freedom can easily be abused. Man can give up his freedom and become a slave to sin. Nevertheless, freedom is so necessary and valued by Christ, the Church, and all mankind, that it is considered our most cherished possession.

Personal responsibility cannot be divorced from freedom. Christians in our changing complex technological society realize that most things are not just black and white. The hierarchical Church no longer tries, nor intends to give exact blueprints for each and every situation. This cannot be done in a society of constant change. The job of the hierarchical church is to enunciate the morality intrinsic to the Gospel and thus to create a positive climate within which the Christian will understand the nature of his tasks, be able to form his conscience and act in the full light of that conscience on his own responsibility.

Supremacy of Conscience

The Canadian Bishops in the Winnipeg meeting of 1968 pointed out that the Christian theology regarding conscience has its roots in the teaching of St. Paul (Rom. 14, 23 and 1 Cor. 10). This has been echoed in our day by Vatican II: “Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths” (#16 Church in the Modern World). “On his part, man perceives and acknowledges the imperatives of the divine law through the mediation of conscience. In all his activity a man is bound to follow his conscience faithfully, in order that he may come to God, for whom he was created” (# 3 Religious Freedom). The dignity of man consists precisely in his ability to achieve his fulfillment in God through the exercise of a knowing and free choice. Thus, he must not act on blind impulse and he must not be pressured into a choice.

“Right” vs “Wrong” Conscience

Every man by his nature has the obligation to seek the truth. But man is limited and cannot grasp all aspects of the truth. He is obliged to form his conscience in the light of the truth as he sees it. A man who honestly seeks for truth and accept it as he finds it has a “right” conscience. The man who has no regard for what is right and true but follows his own whims and moods has a “wrong” conscience. Freedom of conscience does not mean freedom to do as one likes but rather to do as a responsible conscience directs. A mature Christian must form his conscience in the light of the teaching of the Church with regard to truth. He has the responsibility to apply the law of the Church and the law of love to his circumstances here and now. In applying these laws, he must always remember that the law of love which is the law of Christ is the greatest law.

Conclusion

Man is meant to be free. This gives him his dignity, and this is a basic human need. He has a conscience that helps him to act responsibly. This conscience is formed by Christian living, law, and instruction. So that conscience and law go together. Sometimes there is a conflict. In that case, conscience is supreme. This does not mean that one's life is guided by selfish whims or moods but by deeply formed principles of life.

PARTICULAR PROBLEMS

1. Birth Control

Vatican II's document on the Church in the Modern World avoided the traditional language of "Primary and Secondary" ends of marriage. Instead, it clearly taught the importance of the two basic values of marriage, natural marital love and the raising of a family. The decision about the size of the family is a decision which only the couple themselves can make. An attitude of responsible parenthood is encouraged, that is, generosity balanced with common sense (See Documents of Vatican II. America Press, pp 252-256).

The main purpose of Pope Paul's encyclical Humanae Vitae was to uphold and protect the value of human life. He spoke against a selfish contraceptive mentality which would make the pursuit of luxuries more important than having a family.

The Canadian Bishops in their statement on the encyclical declared themselves in basic agreement with the Pope. However, they recognize the extreme difficulty many Catholics have in accepting an absolute ban on all contraceptive methods, whether for theoretical or practical reasons.

"It is a fact that a certain number of Catholics, although admittedly subject to the teaching of the encyclical, find it either extremely difficult or even impossible to make their own all elements of this doctrine ... Since they are not denying any point of divine and Catholic faith nor rejecting the teaching authority of the Church, these Catholics should not be considered, nor consider themselves, shut off from the body of the faithful ..."

"Counsellors may meet others who, accepting the teaching of the Holy Father, find that because of particular circumstances they are involved in what seems to them a clear conflict of duties, e.g., the reconciling of conjugal love and responsible parenthood with the education of children already born or with the health of the mother. In accord with the accepted principles of moral theology, if these persons have tried sincerely but without success to pursue a line of conduct in keeping with the given directives, they may be safely assured that whoever honestly chooses that course which seems right to him does so in good conscience" (Canadian Bishops statement on Humanae Vitae).

2. Marriage and Divorce

There is no doubt that Christ has given us the ideal of marriage between one man and one woman until death. Therefore, the Catholic Church continues to teach the unity and indissolubility of marriage. The Church believes that a

marriage between two Christians who have actually lived together as husband and wife cannot be dissolved.

The Catholic Church does grant annulments (a declaration that there never was a real marriage) in cases where it can be clearly proven that one of the persons did not enter the marriage freely, or did not really intend to be married, or for a certain number of other serious legal reasons. A difficulty arises when clear legal proof is lacking. Following is the way the Dutch Catechism treats these difficult cases.

“Cases undoubtedly occur where the mutual consent was not humanly complete. This can happen where the partners are spiritually non-adult, not entirely free, and not clear enough about what they are undertaking by getting married...”

“In Canon law, such marriages cannot later be declared null and void, because no one can provide clear proof of lack of freedom when the marriage contract was made. Here we have a conflict between a just law which is based on correct principles but can lead in some cases to the continuation of an injustice. On the one hand, there is public order in the Church, for which the Church, as witness to Christ, must always champion, even as regard marriage. On the other hand, there is the individual conscience - assuming that this is not the cloak of purely selfish interests but the recognition of God's supreme lordship. The result is a tragic inner discord. In such cases a thorough discussion with a prudent priest can free people from many unnecessary anxieties. It can even happen to a Christian - after sincere consideration and prayer - will come to the conclusion that his marriage does not bind him in conscience and that a second marriage would not therefore really mean 'living in sin' - though it might be termed so, understandably, by others ... A New Catechism, pp. 395 396

An even more difficult case occurs where marriages which were freely contracted break down and turn into intolerable situations (for example, if one spouse becomes insane, if one abandons the other over a long period of time, or if the couple simply cannot live together in peace after repeated efforts to do so, etc. Traditionally the church has recognized the right of the partners to separate from each other. The problem arises if a separated person enters a second marriage outside the Church.

“What are we, as Christians to think of such situations? Prescinding from the fact that a better preparation for marriage might well have prevented such conflicts arising, it remains true that we should never judge such people harshly. Whether they are necessarily and perpetually to be excluded from the fellowship of the Eucharist can only be judged by God who knows all things. In particular cases a wise priest will be able to help them come to a conclusion themselves on the matter. In such a discussion, for instance, their actual obligations, in terms of the situation which has now arisen, may become clearer. It made for instance, be

their duty, in a situation possibly brought about by sinfulness, to do the best they can with their lives and the lives of those for whom they are now responsible.”

“In this world of failures, the sacraments are given to men to nourish and strengthen them. Though the priest can help them to form their conscience, he cannot take over the duty of making the decision. Here too it is true that the final certainty of conscience is achieved by the individual himself” (A New Catechism pp. 396-397).

3. Medico-Moral Problems

Recent rapid advances in this area of medical knowledge and techniques have given rise to an immense number of new problems. Father Curran reminds us that; “Today Catholic theologians are questioning many of the present teachings in the area of medical ethics” (C.E Curran A New Look at Christian Morality, p.164). Because of the new knowledge and the new questions, it is simply impossible to summarize correct opinions about the morality of heart transplants, care of the sick, sterilization, direct and indirect abortion, determination of time of death, etc. At least it is impossible to summarize all these opinions within the space of these few pages. Someone faced with a problem in this area should consult a priest or talk the problem over with a competent doctor.

4. Injustice and Prejudice

In the past Catholics have been criticized for being so obsessed with sins of the sexual realm that they neglected the more important demands of justice and charity. We must admit a great deal of validity to the criticism. Each of us needs continual reminding that sins of injustice and prejudice, lack of concern for other people are the worst sins for a Christian.

PART FOUR

SUGGESTED READINGS

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Good News for Modern Man. New York, American Bible Society. 1966. This paperback edition is an excellent translation of the New Testament into modern English

Walter M. Abbott, The Documents of Vatican II. New York. America Press, 1966. This paperback edition has notes, comments, and a good index for looking up specific topics. It is a handy book to have since it contains all the documents of Vatican Council II.

A New Catechism, New York, Herder and Herder, 1967. "It may be the best written compendium of the Catholic faith since the Summa" (John L. McKenzie). "It...is written to speak to this modern Christian. It regards him as a responsible, self-directed being whose questioning of the very purpose of existence is a natural activity, and whose reactions to the world around him reflect its complexity. Thus, it is on the basis of events first known in or through history, and with illustrations taken from basic human experiences that the truths of faith are explored and explained in this book. A New Catechism abandons the question and answer form of the past, replacing it by a representation which arouses the reader to think actively about what he reads" (cover of A New Catechism).

Reedy-Andrews, The Perplexed Catholic. A guide Through Confusion, Notre Dame, Ave Maria Press, 1966. Many Catholics have found this but helpful in understanding the recent changes and present transition taking place in the Catholic Church.

Gregory Baum, The Credibility of the Church Today, A reply to Charles Davis, New York, Herder and Herder, 1968. Father Baum writes very clearly, practically and positively. This book is not just a response to Charles Davis. It is a treatment of the new self-understanding of the Church developed at Vatican Council II.

Gregory Baum, Faith and Doctrine, A Contemporary View, Glen Rock, Paulist/Newman Press, 1969. Here Fr. Baum faces the hard questions; he does not merely talk about them. His final question is "Why Be A Catholic?"

Charles E. Curran, A New Look At Christian Morality, Notre Dame, Fides Publishers, 1968. This book is for those who are interested in serious study. Fr. Curran is probably the best known Catholic moral theologian in North America. He refuses to simply repeat the solutions of the past. He attacks each problem with sound scholarship and has the courage to suggest new solutions.

Gerard Sloyan, How Do I Know I'm Doing Right, Dayton Ohio, Pflam Publishers, 1966. This is a very readable explanation have the place of law and conscience in Christian morality.

John J. Kirvan, The Restless Believers, Glen Rock, Paulist Press, 1966. This book treats the problems of belief on college campuses.

Victor Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning, New York, Washington Square Press, 1963. After three grim years in Auschwitz and other Nazi prisons, Dr. Frankel gained freedom only to learn that almost his entire family had been wiped out. But during, and partly because of, the almost incredible suffering and degradations of those harrowing years, he developed his theory of Logotherapy. In his own words, "Logotherapy ... makes the concept of man into a whole... and focuses its attention upon mankind's groping for a higher meaning in life."

Erich Fromm, The Art of Loving, New York, Bantam Books, 1963. In this startling book Dr. Fromm discusses love in all its aspects, not only romantic love, so surrounded by false concepts, but also love of parents for children, brotherly love, erotic love, self-love and love of God.

Andrew Greeley, Strangers In the House, Catholic Youth in America, Garden City, New York, Image Books, 1967. Father Greeley writes from years of experience working with young people. He avoids glib solutions to their problems but helps us to understand in depth the hidden sources of the problems. The book is a little hard on parents but reading it could help many parents avoid serious mistakes.

Joseph Goldbrunner, Holiness is Wholeness, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1964.

Teilhard de Chardin. Le Milieu Divin, London, Fontana Books, 1964. "This book is not specifically addressed to Christians who are firmly established in their faith and have nothing more to learn about its beliefs. It is written for the waverers, both inside and outside". (Preface)

Harvey Cox, The Secular City, New York, Macmillan Company, 1966. The rise of urban civilization and the collapse of traditional religion are two hallmarks of our era. This book examines these two phenomena, using both sociological and theological approaches. It is, by and large, a celebration of the new freedom and scope brought to man by secularization, and a reminder that the new freedom requires a new maturity and a new measure of responsibility.

Harvey Cox, God's Revolution and Man's Responsibility. Valley Forge, The Judson Press, 1965. Our times offer abundant evidence that organized Christianity is failing to fulfill its responsibility in bringing about the changes most desperately needed in the world. The great events of our day are occurring apart from the Church, and this fact indicates to Harvey Cox, that the secular world is the principle arena of God's work today. He is a prophet of God's reconciliation whether in matters of race, ecumenical, or world order. He feels that Christians who stand with him will have to enter more vitally into the secular world if they are to be agents of reconciliation