

## THE CATHOLIC MIND

“LOVE not the world, nor the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh and the concupiscence of the eyes and the pride of life, which is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the concupiscence thereof: but he that doth the will of God abideth for ever. . .” (I John ii, 15-17).

Bossuet recalls these words at the beginning of his *Traité de la Concupiscence*, and he adds this brief but profound commentary: “The last words of the Apostle show that the ‘World’ of which he speaks consists of all those who choose things visible and passing in preference to things invisible and eternal.” I would add in my turn that once we have grasped this definition of “the World,” we have as good as solved the vast problem we are going to discuss.

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We are in the world. That is a fact, whether we like it or not. We cannot alter that fact. And yet we are told that we must not be *of* the world. How be in it and yet not of it? That is the great problem that has haunted the Christian conscience from the beginning. It is true that the Church offers one radical solution: to flee from the world, to renounce it utterly and take refuge in the religious life. But that solution cannot be everybody’s. It must always be the prerogative of a chosen few. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that monks and nuns themselves do not flee from the world except in order to save it by saving themselves.

The world has one perennial complaint against Christians. It is that Christians despise the world; and in despising it misunderstand and depreciate the values inherent in nature: its goodness, its beauty, its truth. Hence all the reproaches which are constantly directed against us in the name of philosophy, history, science. Christianity, it is urged, neglects to take into account the *whole* of human nature; on the pretext of improving human nature it mutilates it, compelling us to disregard so much that makes life and nature

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splendid, calling on us to reject progress, suspect science. . .

These reproaches are so familiar that we tend to become unconcerned about them. But it is our duty to reply to them with equal persistence, and, above all, never to forget what the reply is.

Christianity is indeed a radical negation of *the world*. But it is, at the same time, an unqualified affirmation of *nature*. The error lies in confusing these two distinct things. The "world" is not nature; it is nature seeking to be independent of God, to become something autonomous, self-contained and self-sufficient.

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What is true of nature in general is especially true of that which is supreme in nature—of *mind*. We read that at the creation God beheld His handiwork and saw that it was all very good. But His greatest creation was man, fashioned in His own image and likeness. If we ask in what this likeness of man to God consists, St. Augustine will tell us that it is *in mente*, in his mind, his thought. St. Augustine will tell us further that we are to find that likeness especially in that part of the mind which is, as it were, its apex, which puts us into touch with God, the Source of all truth. The destiny of man here below, according to Christianity, is to know truth, however partially and imperfectly, until he can enjoy the full vision of it in heaven. Christianity, so far from belittling mind, cherishes it above all earthly things: *Intellectum valde ama*.

We value and love mind and the things of the mind as much and more than our critics. But we do not value it in the same way. There is a love of mind which is worldly, which seeks to concentrate it upon visible and passing things. But there is also a love of mind which seeks further to direct it to the invisible and eternal. That is our attitude to mind; and we prefer it, for while it denies us nothing that the other gives, it gives us all that the other denies.

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In order to understand and share the Christian mind and its attitude to philosophy, science and art, we must enter into

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the heart of the mystery of the Incarnation. God becomes man; two natures, the divine and the human, are united in the one Person of Christ. Of that we are all aware; but few go on to consider the amazing transformation which this fact brings about throughout the whole of nature and how it should affect our whole bearing towards it.

God is Ruler of nature. But from the moment the Son of God took human nature, the Ruler of nature is not only God but also man. Since there is now a member of our human race who can truly be called the God-Man, that One is the Head and Ruler of the rest; in a word, He is our King. Hence Christ is not only the spiritual but also the temporal Ruler of the world.

Furthermore, as St. Paul teaches, the Church is His Body; we are His members. "And what is more," as St. Thomas says (*De Regimine Principum*, i, 14), "all the faithful, because they are His members, are kings and priests." Sharing in the life of the Head, each Christian is an image of, nay more, a sharer in, the supreme fact of the Incarnation. Humanity is made Godlike, is divinized by grace; arrayed in the royal and priestly vesture of Christ.

Few have understood this transformation of nature by the Incarnation better than did Pascal. It is not merely that we cannot know God except through Jesus Christ, the visible manifestation of God to us. The great discovery, or rather, rediscovery, of Pascal was that the Incarnation so profoundly changed our own human nature that only through the Incarnation can we know man himself. "Not only," he wrote, "do we not know God except through Jesus Christ; we do not know even ourselves except through Him. Without Jesus Christ we do not know the meaning of our life nor our death; we know neither God nor ourselves."

What light does this throw on the nature and purpose of mind?

Mind, like everything else in nature, is good; but only to the extent that it fulfils its function and the purpose for which it is intended; only, that is to say, in the measure in which it is directed towards truth and to God the Source of all truth. So soon as it is made an end in itself it is deflected

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from God, and becomes deflected in itself from its own purpose. Grace alone can heal it, by redirecting it to God. "Worldliness" is precisely the refusal of grace: the refusal to be directed towards God; and the mind becomes "worldly" to the extent that it refuses grace. The mind which accepts grace is the specifically Christian and Catholic mind. And this specifically Christian state of mind the world misunderstands and invites us unceasingly to repudiate.

In this invitation there is a very real temptation. We do not, of course, doubt the truth of Christianity; we are firmly determined to use our minds as Christians. But do we know what means to take in order to do so? Do we really understand in what the distinctive characteristics of Christianity consist? The early Christians understood it clearly enough. Christianity in their day was less remote from its origins, and the dividing line between it and its opponents was more clearly defined. There was no mistaking the enemy: the manifest paganism which was ignorant alike of the sin that kills and the grace that saves. Hence, not only then but throughout her history, the Church has incessantly recalled to men's minds the corruption of our sinful nature, the feebleness of reason without revelation, the impotence of will without grace. St. Augustine fought with all his might against Pelagianism because he recognized in it a revival of paganism under a cloak of Christianity, a paganism which sought to restore the ancient naturalism within the very heart of Christendom. The naturalism of the Renaissance made a similar attempt. And in our own day we find ourselves in a world which sets out to be *naturally* healthy, *naturally* good and just, without reference to God and His grace. Having forgotten the facts of sin and grace it conceives its own corruption to be the law of nature itself.

That is not surprising. What is truly alarming is that paganism should be able again, as in the time of Pelagius, to try to penetrate into Christianity itself and to succeed sometimes in its attempt. This is a very real danger. To live as a Christian, feel as a Christian, think as a Christian in a society which is not Christian is immensely difficult. Hence the constant temptation to water-down the truth, perhaps in

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order to break down the barriers between ourselves and the world, perhaps in the sincere desire to make Christianity more palatable to the world and so advance the work of its salvation.

Hence arise those errors, that loose-thinking, those compromises against which the zeal of reformers in every age has been directed. To restore Christendom to its primitive unadulterated purity was the first aim of Luther and Calvin; it is that of the illustrious Calvinist theologian Karl Barth in our own day. Barth's object is to purify Liberal Protestantism from naturalism and to restore the Reformed Churches themselves to unqualified submission to the Word of God. God has spoken, says Barth, man can but listen with docility and repeat what God has said. But, unfortunately, man must interpret: God has spoken, the Barthian listens and repeats what Barth has said. According to the Barthian theology nature is so totally and incurably corrupt that there is nothing in it but corruption. Grace can pardon; it cannot heal. This doctrine would arm us against paganism and Pelagianism by inviting us to despair of nature and to abandon every hope and effort to save and rechristianize human reason.

Thus two diametrically opposite dangers threaten us: the danger of accepting the world in affirming nature, and the danger of denying nature in affirming super-nature.

Against these Catholicism teaches *the healing of wounded nature through the grace of Jesus Christ*. Nature is curable, and it must be cured. Nature exists, is good, is not wholly corrupt. It is God's handiwork, and though spoiled is redeemed by the Blood of Christ. Grace presupposes nature, it heals and transforms it. The Church, unlike Calvinism and Lutheranism, refuses to despair of nature; she rests gently upon it, dresses its wounds. Our God is not merely a Judge who forgives: He is first of all a Physician who heals, and He will not forgive until He has healed.

But neither will the Church believe that nature is capable of healing itself without the help of grace. She is opposed alike to the despair of Protestantism and the presumption of naturalism. The Protestant accuses the Catholic of too much

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esteem for nature, of degrading Christianity to the level of paganism. The Catholic knows he does nothing of the sort: it is the Protestant who confuses nature with "the world." The pagan, on the other side, accuses the Christian of hating nature, despising, mutilating, torturing it. But the Catholic knows that he chastizes nature only because of his love for it; because evil has entered so deeply into it that only by making it suffer can it be purified. Catholicism alone understands what nature is, what "the world" is, what grace is; and it knows these things only because its gaze is centred on the real, concrete union of grace and nature in the Person of the Healer of nature, Jesus Christ.

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How is the human mind to be redirected to God and healed? How are we to use our minds in the service of Christ our King? To serve Him is to unite our efforts with His. In the words of St. Paul, we are to be His co-operators; we are to work with Him and let Him work in us and through us for the salvation of the human mind. To do this we must follow His own example; we must disentangle nature from "the world," and we must employ our own minds as God has appointed.

Here, it seems to me, we need to examine our consciences. We have all met with Christians who think they honour God in affecting towards science or philosophy or art an indifference that borders on contempt. Such contempt may sometimes be an expression of real greatness, but it may also be the expression of pettiness. It pleases me to be told that the whole of philosophy is not worth an hour's labour if he who tells me is a Pascal, one of the world's greatest thinkers. One has the right to look down on what one knows and has transcended. Pascal did not despise science or philosophy; but he resented the time they had occupied him and distracted him from the contemplation of the deeper mysteries of divine love. But we are not all Pascals; we cannot look down on that which is above us, and science is one of the noblest praises of God: it is the understanding of what God has made.

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Nevertheless, Jesus Christ did not come to save men by science or philosophy. He came to save *all* men; *even* scientists and philosophers. Science and philosophy are not necessary to salvation; they themselves need salvation. On the other hand, we must beware of an indiscreet zeal which, under pretext of saving them, destroys them. It is to be feared that, with the best intentions in the world, some "apologists" are apt to do this. To use science for apologetic purposes is an admirable programme, provided we know not only our science but our apologetic.

For to be a good apologist one must first be a theologian—a very good theologian. That is a rare thing. There are too many so-called theologians who know smatterings of other people's theology or who are content to repeat theological formulas without having ever thought out their real meaning. But if we are going to "use" science for apologetics, we must also be very good scientists, not cultivated dilettanti with smatterings of scientific information. If we would study science for God, we must study it for its own sake—or as if we were studying it for its own sake; that is the only way to acquire it. The same rule applies to philosophy. It is an illusion to suppose we can serve God by learning off a number of philosophical formulas without knowing why they are true. Similarly, it is useless to denounce errors if we do not understand why they are false. All this applies also to art. We are told that it was the Faith that raised up the great mediæval cathedrals; but the Faith would have been powerless without architecture. Though the façade of Notre-Dame may be an expression of the soul's yearning for God, it is also certainly a construction of geometry.

We Catholics, we who affirm the inherent goodness of nature, must take as the guiding principle of our action the axiom that *piety can never dispense with technique*. Without technical ability the most intense piety is incapable of using nature for the glory of God.

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In conclusion, we must consider the other danger that threatens us. To serve God by science or art we must practise

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them *as if* they were ends in themselves. This is difficult, because they always tend to become so in fact, and as such they are regarded by our contemporaries. We must on no account become infected.

Here I feel obliged to criticize not only my opponents but also my friends—and myself. It seems to me that one of the greatest evils from which Catholicism suffers to-day is that Catholics are not sufficiently proud of their Faith. I fear that, instead of acknowledging in all simplicity what we owe to our Church and our Faith, we incline to consider it sound policy, in the Church's own interests, to act as if we differed in nothing from others. Some of us, I fear, like to hear it said of us: "He is a Catholic, but one would never know it." We do not, indeed, want Catholics who flaunt their religion as a feather in their cap. But we *do* want Catholics who will so permeate their daily life and work with their Catholicism that the unbeliever will learn to admire the hidden power that inspires them, and will say: "He is a fine man, and I know why: he is a Catholic."

We need faith in our own work and in the redemptive and transforming power of Christ within us. We must emphasize that in season and out of season. But that is not what we always do. To take an example: If there is one truth that the Fathers, theologians and Popes have stressed more than another it is that philosophy should be the servant of theology. Nowadays we seem ever anxious to explain that truth away or disregard it entirely. It is thought smart to say that a Christian thinker is a good philosopher precisely because he keeps his philosophy independent of his Christianity. What we need is a philosopher who, like St. Thomas and Scotus, will take the lead in the philosophical thought of our time precisely because he is a Catholic and thinks as one.

It is to our Catholicism that we owe our reverence for nature, for mind and for the technique which enables us to use and know nature. This debt we must repay by learning to lead back the human mind to its Creator, the *Deus scientiarum Dominus*. I have presumed to recommend the practice of science and art to all those whose vocation it is to serve God in these spheres. I would now recommend to those who have mastered these things the study of theology also if they would lead them back to God.



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Undeniably this is a hard task. It will require collaboration if we are to succeed. We are faced to-day with a new problem and we must seek new means to solve it. In the Middle Ages study of any kind was practically the exclusive preserve of clerics; those who studied philosophy and the sciences were also students of theology. That state of affairs has long passed. To-day the theologian knows little of the sciences and the scientist knows little of theology, even if he does not despise it. That is understandable among non-Catholics; but it is disastrous among those who profess the Faith. However much they may wish to use their brains and their knowledge in the service of God, they are incapable of doing so because of their ignorance of the Faith. We *must* understand that we live in an age in which theology can no longer be the prerogative of a few specialists. Doubtless the clergy are right to consider it as their special domain and to take the lead in theological thought. Indeed it is imperative for the future of Christianity that they do so and with renewed intensity. When theology declines the Word of God is bound, and nature turns from grace to paganism. But on the other hand, if the word of God is to be not only spoken but *heard* there must also be hearers; those who labour as Christians in science and art must be able to understand it and to penetrate into its inmost meaning.

Theology must be revived; it must penetrate into and permeate the mind of the scientist, the reason of the philosopher and the inspiration of the artist. So will mind be used in the service of Christ the King; so will His Kingdom come; so shall we assist the rebirth of nature, co-operating with the fecundity of grace. To co-operate with Him we must first hear His voice, repeat His Word as the Church repeats it, and then proclaim it publicly and fearlessly. Whether men believe it or not does not depend on us; at least we can make them respect it. Those who are not ashamed of the Gospel may fail to make men accept it; but those who *are* ashamed of it will fail to command respect even for themselves.

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*(Abridged and adapted from the French by  
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