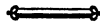


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WORSHIP & THE COMMON LIFE



CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM STATED

It has long been a commonplace that religion and the daily life should be one. The two spheres have at times been so widely and so deliberately held apart, whether in the supposed interests of the one or of the other, that men have regarded their unity as a distant aspiration. When the doctrine *cujus regio ejus religio* was adopted to express an uneasy alliance of religious and secular life, the two spheres were both in process of drastic re-formation, and an attempt was made to divide the territory of human life between them. Christians were surely aware of their Master's judgment that they should render to Caesar those things which were Caesar's. Yet, when the division had to become actual, the temptation to find those things which were God's confined to a realm where Caesar himself would not wish to dispute God's claim to them proved too strong, and the religion of the national state readily declined into an other-worldly emphasis. After this initial victory, it followed naturally that Caesar should teach his followers that the territory in which he was supreme was a land of solid worth, and that the cloud-cuckoo land of religion was not only negligible but even despicable.

At a later stage of development, the weakness of human nature led many professing Christians, well versed in the other-worldly aspirations which were supposed to be religion, to behave in this world in a manner largely unrelated even to the slender connection which remained between religion and daily life. 'The best of both worlds' became a charge only too easy to bring, and only too difficult to disprove. The best and truest philanthropy

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of the later Victorian age, for example, was vitiated owing to the obvious hypocrisy of wealthy employers whose practice in the world could not bear examination in the light of their professions in their churches. This fact has led true Christian philanthropy increasingly to stress the outward and practical expression of its faith. In seeking by such means to unify religion and life men have in fact increasingly divorced them.

It will be necessary to examine this divorce in closer detail at a later stage. It is enough at the outset to notice the admitted facts. But in doing so we must remember that the initial claim is not that religion and life should be consistent one with the other, but that they should in fact be one and indivisible. To admit two spheres of influence in the life of man, and to seek the most intimate and subtle relation between them, is to beg the whole question. However far we may have fallen in the course of human history, the claim asserted at the outset is that human life is one whole, in one single relation to the Creator-Spirit. Separation there may truly be, but it is the violent separation of a deadly wound in the one body, not the divorce between two incompatible and self-contained bodies. We are dealing, so to speak, not with an unsuccessful liaison, but with a broken marriage, where the one flesh of Divine creation has been torn asunder.

So far we have spoken of religion and life. It is now necessary to define terms a little more closely, and to examine our title—*Worship and the common life*. In seeking a reintegration so fundamental in the whole range of human life, we are concerned with the basic relationship of the human spirit to God and to humanity—with the two sides of a single coin. This fundamental relationship to God may certainly be defined as religion, as a binding of spirit to spirit, but the necessary expression of that binding in human life must be found in worship, in a total attitude to life, and a total valuation of it.

This closer definition is needed in order that we may avoid misunderstanding at the outset. However important the ethical aspects of life, however necessary it be that man should recognise

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himself as standing in a moral relationship to the universe, he cannot fulfil such obligations by concentrating upon them as ends in themselves. By so doing he will inevitably become enmeshed in introspective comparison of his own conduct with that of his fellows. These essential obligations should arise as by-products, as the normal fruit of a healthy life and growth. The whole energy must be bent towards the sources of that life and the enabling of that growth. This perception of the supreme goodness—this total orientation towards its creative energy—is worship. ‘He has fixed their sight upon the beauty of His presence and they see naught that is like unto Him in all that is visible... Their longing is only for that which is to be found in His presence, and their going to and fro is round about Him alone.’¹ This practice of a total worship relates all the affairs of the common life to one centre from which all derive their meaning, their relevance, their inter-relationship and their order. Religion consists before all else of such worship. That which binds the created spirit to the Creator Spirit is the outgoing love of the Creator and the responding adoration of the creature. Whatever be the consequent response in conduct, the central need is for this total response of self-yielding, whereby all that makes up the common life is brought as an offering, that it may be made holy.

Just as the term ‘religion’ has been made more precise by this definition, it is necessary similarly to define our use of the term ‘life’. By the common life we mean the whole social structure in which human beings are related in their ordinary human activities. This common life is to be known primarily in personal terms, and for that reason in terms of human society—the fellowship of persons. Obviously the high doctrines of politics and economics are of great importance, but these sciences are made for man, and are never rightly viewed when they are depersonalised. It may now be assumed, in common with much modern thinking, that personality implies community,² and that

¹ al-Ghazali (Sufi), A.D. 1059–1111.

² *Vide inf.* pp. 79 f.

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the individual can never be judged solely in isolation. The soul which is of infinite worth to God, and whose ultimate separateness seems to be cherished by His love, is still valued as a member of the human family, and its response to the Father from whom the family derives its name and nature is a corporate response. Those who are familiar with present-day religious thinking and exposition, as for example that of such writers as Prof. John MacMurray, or the general trend of the *Christian News-Letter*, will not imagine that in this view there is any undervaluing of individual religious experience or of the approach of the individual soul to God. What is stressed, and will be developed more fully in succeeding chapters, is that the response of worship in the sense here defined is the response of an individual in his social setting, the offering of a life which is conditioned always and inevitably by its relationships within the common life of humanity. It is in this sense that the then Archbishop of York could say truly in a recent broadcast (1 March 1942) that Christians come to God only as members of the Church. Such a statement might seem wholly unjustified apart from the special context here stated in different words. Thus, the common life in which the individual is bound should form the total offering of Christian adoration. Anything short of this is an incomplete offering. Part of the price has been withheld.

Directly the field is so defined it is obvious to every sincere Christian, and still more to the non-Christian critics of the Church, that the ideal is so far unrealised that it might be non-existent. No one could guess that such an ideal was the objective and the purpose of worship, or that such an aim was held up by Christians as the true character of the common life. But when we come to recognise and to study the nature of the divorce between worship and the common life, it is readily seen that the gulf is widening daily. Even the metaphor of a widening gulf may be irrelevant. The two fields are so separated and their character so different that men may and do question whether there is any sense in which they can be regarded as drifting apart,

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since this implies a past linking which cannot be traced, and which is often regarded as wholly undesirable. In each of these separated fields serious concern is evident. The present decade may well become known as that in which men sought a 'new order' in the common life, not merely as social enthusiasm has sought for it for generations past, but with a new eagerness of despair. In the field of worship and the inner life of the Church, similarly, there is a new kind of Christian concern and Christian energy at work. A common purpose and a common heritage is being discovered. Men are openly, if a trifle wistfully, seeking in the life of worship an intensity of devotion comparable to that which is offered by other means for other ends in the life of the secular world.

But the very use of the word 'secular' in this context serves to show how these two fields of human concern are still regarded by many as separated and disconnected. The life of religion is still conceived as influencing the common life of mankind externally, from a separate base, as it were. It is perhaps significant that the most dramatic religious revival of recent centuries has spoken in terms of the impact of individual piety, or of the sum effect of individual pieties upon an unconverted world. The relation of religion to the common life has been conceived in exaggerated terms as the changing of separate persons from one order of living to another. Not the least damaging effect of the Buchmanite group-movement has lain in the artificiality of its inner relationships, divorced as they have often proved to be from any adequate sense that man's offering to God is found amid the common life of a sinful world, and not in some exotic growth removed from the world.¹

If there be any true possibility of a resurrection of Christendom, it must mean the emergence of a common life which is admittedly and recognisably lived within a frame of reference whose nature, whose unity, and whose exclusive claim upon all rational living and thinking are unquestioned. That frame of reference will be

¹ *Vide inf.* p. 57.

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no 'new order', but the order which has been from the beginning, the order which is being called out of chaos in the developing purpose of God for human life. Men will not all at once so completely share a common understanding of that order. In the course of their approach to it they may differ as now in its interpretation at this or at that point. But as to its relevance for the common life there will be no dispute. The common life will be seen as held in the purpose of God, and the offering of worship to God will seek only to give to Him that which is already His own.

Such a statement lays an emphasis which is different from the ordinary understanding of the evangelisation of the world by the Church. This difference must be recognised and admitted. The question as to whether the new emphasis is a desirable or a creative one must be answered as the argument of this book proceeds. For the moment let us notice that the emphasis is different. Were it to be claimed as offering in itself a new basis of reconstruction, the condemnation of St Paul for those who lay new foundations would be merited. 'If a man misapply his own mission, and attempt to lay a foundation other than that already laid, which is Christ Jesus, let him be sure that he will receive the appropriate reward for such a corruption and reversal of the grace God gave him.'¹ Far from any such desire for a new basis of reconstruction, the whole possibility of any total integration of worship and the common life rests upon the fact that God became Man and that Eternity took possession of the world of time.

Upon this basis obviously rests the life of the Church and the community of those made one in Christ Jesus. For them the full Christian allegiance is paramount, and at all times they must present to the world the divine pattern of human society. But, as Mr T. S. Eliot has wisely shown, there must exist around this nucleus a Christian society whose traditions and standards are admittedly derived from the Christian understanding of the ends

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 12-13, tr. G. W. Cornish, *St Paul from the trenches*. Heffer, 1937.

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of life, and whose public affairs are related to that understanding. 'Full Christian virtue cannot exist without full Christian belief, but there is natural virtue about which Christian and non-Christian can agree.'¹

The committed Christian can never be wholly content with such a broadened basis. Least of all is it adequate as a standard for his own living. But he is not demanding more from his fellows than faithfulness to the highest truth that they have seen. A concrete and topical example—though only one partial example—of this necessary distinction is found in the relations of the Christian pacifist with a world at war. For himself, the Christian loyalty is paramount. He would constantly hold it as a challenge before all his fellow-Christians, for upon this issue the Church has not yet reached a common mind. He cannot believe that their Christianity is complete without such a loyalty, but he is saved from lack of charity, and from intolerance, by knowledge of the imperfection of his own loyalty in many other ways, in which it may be that they far exceed him in their discipleship. But in common with them in the one Church there should be maintained a ceaseless vigilance and witness to the world outside the Church. If the society in which these Christians live is to make any claim to being a Christian society in the widest sense of that term (as at the present time the British, American and others of the united nations would claim), there are certain motives, and practices arising from those motives, which at any cost the society must reject and condemn. This is illustrated by the case of those who believe upon moral grounds that the aggression of the German Reich must be resisted. This view may be held in a Christian society, but it may not be held in order to justify a demand for vengeance. When the State which expresses the public life of such a Christian society resorts to means which deny the broadly Christian aims which it has professed, that State must and frequently does pass under the condemnation not merely of the committed Christian, but of the moral sense

¹ T. S. Eliot, *Christian News-Letter*, No. 97.

of the wider Christian society, which must repudiate the actions committed in its name.¹

Many wider and more complex illustrations arise in any attempt to work out a political programme within such a Christian society. Such detail is not the purpose of this book. The single point to be established here is that such discrimination between the total Christian allegiance and the wider relationships which grow up around it is not merely a plea for compromise. It is a recognition of the conditions under which human life is lived, and a necessary first step as we come to consider in detail the reintegration of worship and the common life.

That the hope of a world order informed by Christian principles is essentially different from Christianity should be evident in the simple fact that it is a world order—a goal of human attainment in the world of time. To those who are accustomed to regard the Kingdom of God as being the result of a human social programme, this distinction will not be acceptable. It is, however, precisely in this view that the utopian weakness of recent Christian thinking has been betrayed. Obviously, human society can attain more or less closely to the will of God. It is, further, an essential of faith that there is a will of God for all the life of man, for otherwise the significance of human life would disappear. Obviously, again, the effort of the individual contributes towards the gradual perfecting of a human society which he may not live to see, and for the Christian individual ‘what matters most in human affairs is the effort to live eternally’. But neither for the individual nor for society is there any temporal achievement in this world which may be equated with the realm of God. Prof. Maritain has drawn the necessary distinction very clearly:

The word *Christianity*...has a religious and spiritual significance; it denotes faith and supernatural life. By the phrase *the christian world*, on the other hand, I mean something in time and belonging to this world....A philosopher...who

1 *Vide inf.* p. 109.

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raises the question of the Christian world is not raising the issue of the truth of *Christianity*, but of the *temporal responsibilities of Christians*.¹

One point remains at this stage. It has been made clear that the desire for such a reintegration is not merely a judgment that the common life should be conformed more and more closely to Christian principles. This should be too obvious to need restatement. What is less obvious is the manner in which it can be achieved. We are here making not merely a judgment as to the character of the common life. There is also a judgment as to the true nature of religion and the needed quality of its expression in worship. The basic conviction behind the present study is that only a worship which is sacramental in its intention, its expression and its proved effect can be capable of total integration with the common life of man.² Only such worship can progressively embrace the whole range and diversity of that life. Only in such worship can that life attain the divine consecration and acceptance, so that 'the two shall be one, and that which is without as that which is within'.³

¹ Maritain, *True Humanism*, p. 34, tr. Adamson. Geoffrey Bles, 1938.

² *Vide inf.* p. 88. This conviction is stated here without development, in order to emphasise it at the outset. Its treatment in later chapters should be awaited to avoid serious misunderstanding from the present use of the term 'sacramental', more especially by members of the Society of Friends.

³ Second Epistle of Clement, para. 12: *vide inf.* p. 151.

CHAPTER II

THE END OF OUR TIME

THE evident separation between religion and the life of man which is thus briefly stated needs at this stage a careful diagnosis. It has been presented as a separation which has grown progressively more complete and drastic. This implies a period when the separation was far less serious, perhaps a period when religion and life were effectively unified in a Christian society. A further implication is of a discernible cause, or a complex of causes, which led to such separation. The disintegration of any society may, it is true, arise from the destructive effect of evil forces, or as the equally disruptive result of good intentions. Most human history is so complex that we may expect to find both evil and good at work. When, however, such a chain of causation has been traced back to its origins, and the effects at each stage have been clearly perceived, it may still be undesirable, or even impossible, to restore the *status quo ante*. If the integration that we desire implies the existence not only of the Christian Church as a world-wide fact, but also of a Christian society finding its public expression in state organisations informed by the principles of such a society, it is hardly conceivable that in the modern world there is still a place for ancient or mediaeval social forms. It would, in fact, be faithless to seek a backward look to some imagined Golden Age. The essential mark of the Christian Church is that it bears as its constant creative inspiration not only its gospel of what God has done, but its experience of what He is daily doing in the continuing process of creation, redemption, and sanctification, in which His life is offered to the world He has made. If we now turn to look back over the course of history, it is only that we may again look forward to see and to follow the present guidance of the Creator-Spirit within the fellowship of the Body of Christ.