
EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

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The fifth in a series of addresses by prominent Catholic laymen entitled "THE ROAD AHEAD," delivered in the Catholic Hour, broadcast by the National Broadcasting Company in cooperation with the National Council of Catholic Men, on July 7, 1946, by G. Howland Shaw, former Assistant Secretary of State. After the series has been concluded on the radio, it will be made available in one pamphlet.

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In a booklet entitled "*Religion and the Professional Man*" Archbishop Cushing of Boston has written these stirring words:

"Our Blessed Lord constantly illustrated his concept of the spiritual life by striking phrases suggestive not of repose or lassitude, but of energetic action, heroic struggle and dynamic vitality. They miss the whole point of the Faith who permit it to become a refuge from reality. Religion must never play the part of a mere policeman in our lives; it must be the dynamic, positive impelling center."

There are, however, the Archbishop goes on to point out, many persons who claim to be religious but who "live in the past" and make of religion "a secret byway to the sweet peace of resignation from life's challenge and turmoil." They have lost all sense of the radicalism of Christianity, of the revolutionary impact of its tenets upon the individual soul and upon society as a whole.

What, for instance, could more properly be described as revolutionary in its nature and in its effects than the Christian belief that each and every human being is of infinite value and significance and in the language of the

preamble to the Declaration of Independence, is endowed by his Creator with certain inalienable rights? And yet while we Christians often repeat such words how weakly, with how much uncertainty do we translate them into action. As a result the Christian Church is far too often made to appear as on the side of conservatism and many Christians would be shocked at the mere suggestion that there is anything revolutionary in the beliefs which they profess.

At least in Europe there are signs that words such as those of Archbishop Cushing are being heeded. In a recent article in a Catholic periodical ("*What I Saw in France*," C. H. Bishop, *The Commonwealth*, Vol. XLIV No. 6) the Church in France is described as "a springboard from which Christians go out into the world to bring Christ everywhere, to be other Christs." And the recent impressive victories of Christian Democratic Parties are to be noted as a particularly hopeful factor in the picture of contemporary Europe. These parties stand for economic and social reforms very much to the left of center but these reforms are derived from traditional relig-

ious and philosophical principles and from the social teachings of Papal Encyclicals from "Rerum Novarum" to "Quadragesimo Anno."

With us in this country the story is different. There are many reasons.

An obvious one immediately comes to mind. We have not passed through the crucible of suffering and destruction through which Europe has passed and is passing. We face no such compelling task of reconstruction from the foundations. We are not forced by the impact of events to go back to first principles and start from scratch in re-applying them. We can still believe in the genial opportunism of the politician and the convenient doctrine that something can be worked out somehow. There are other reasons.

We—and I am now speaking of Christians in general and of Catholics in particular—we have lost far too much of the vitality and the comprehensiveness of the genuine missionary drive. We have become too satisfied with "victories" in which the spiritual factor is none too evident. Perhaps our Church, school and institution buildings, our plant, have induced in us a complacency which is more prop-

erly characteristic of the activities of the material world and of their vested interest point of view. But whatever the causes the fact remains that our drive to apply religious truths to all aspects of contemporary life has been blunted.

In the place of the view of the Church as a springboard from which Christians go out into the world we have developed a policy of protection, of conserving with the utmost care what we already have. At times and in some places this policy has been carried to a point amounting to segregation. It is of course both natural and proper that we should build up our own organizations. There is no danger in that. Danger does arise, however, when loyalty to such organizations is emphasized in such terms as to amount to condemnation of any participation in organizations which bring together different groups in the pursuit of a common objective. Efforts along such lines are sometimes sought to be justified as a measure of quarantine against ideas which are often radically at variance with our own. The implications are scarcely complimentary either to the strength of our religious convictions or to existing methods

of religious instruction. They underestimate moreover the thoroughness with which ideas—good, bad, and indifferent—are spread through the public print, the air and on the screen. Today we can fortify; we cannot protect.

We have put something else in the place of an authentic missionary drive: an extreme sensitiveness to criticism. That sensitiveness takes two forms. First of all a tendency to take far too seriously and to reply at far too great a length to criticism which when analyzed are either not such at all or are too trivial to deserve notice. The effect is to pull us over on to an essentially negative and sterile terrain and to draw us away from the more positive and constructive statement of our beliefs. The second form of our sensitiveness is even more important. We often reply to criticism, however honest and sincere, by name calling and with a vigor of epithet which, whatever credit it reflects upon the range of our vocabularies, certainly does not incline our opponent either to understand our side or even wish to understand it. As Father Trese wrote recently (*The Commonweal*, Vol. XLIV, No. 5): "We have come a long way from the spirit of

Christ who sought to win, rather than to answer, an honest opponent."

At times we have come dangerously close to trying to justify our failings in the name of two great virtues: Humility and Prudence. Humility is indeed a very great and a very important virtue. Its essence has always seemed to me to be a vivid and painful awareness of all that we have received from God as compared with the little we have done in return. In that sense it is a constant spur to action to reduce the discrepancy, but Humility is sometimes made to mean that we can do little or nothing and when so construed it becomes no more than an excuse for inaction. Prudence too can be thought of as a wise adjustment of means and ends, but also as the point of departure for an attenuation of principles and for the obscuring of issues which cannot and must not be obscured.

The description of our failings, although a practice in which we do not sufficiently indulge, is a relatively easy task. What of the remedies?

The first and the most important by far is a constantly renewed sense of the supernatural, a deep awareness of the supernatural, a conviction of close and

intimate relationship with the supernatural. We live in a materialistic, a naturalistic society and we cannot avoid its impact. Our judgment as to values, as to what is primary and what is secondary can easily become obscured by the importance attached to organizations, public relations and the many other factors which contribute to the quantitative impressiveness of the material society with which we are surrounded and of which we are a part. A far more than ordinary effort is required in order to supernaturalize our lives.

It is not sufficient that we who profess religious beliefs should have memorized our catechisms or should have followed more or less attentively some course of religious instruction. We must do far more. In the words of a Catholic layman, the late Thomas F. Woodlock (*The Thread of Arachne*, Columbia, March, 1943):

"The plain truth is that a Catholic who is not trying to be a theologian to the limit of his capacity—subject to the condition of life in which he finds himself—is not pulling his weight in the Catholic boat as his Creator intends him to do."

That is the foundation, but a clear grasp of the applications of

that theology with respect to the problems of the day is scarcely less essential. The Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man are doctrines of theology, but their applications in terms of international relations, race relations, a living wage, decent housing and the treatment of the delinquent and the criminal are by no means always clearly and efficiently proclaimed. In this respect Catholics enjoy a privilege which carries with it a corresponding responsibility. The applications of our theology to the kind of problems I have mentioned have been clearly and repeatedly set forth by succeeding Popes from Leo XIII to Pius XII. We at least cannot plead ignorance of these applications nor that knowledge of them can be obtained only through long and difficult research.

Granted that our knowledge of theology is profound and our understanding of its applications clear, what then? Are this knowledge and this understanding to be kept behind closed doors and for our own exclusive benefit or are we to seek out our fellow citizens who at least in fundamentals believe and think as we do and labor strenuously side by side with them to fashion a Society, international and na-

tional, more in harmony with those fundamentals? And even with those who do not think at all as we do but who are persons of good faith and sincerity are we to avoid them or at best project our answers upon them in provocative terms and with no effort on our part to understand their point of view and therefore with no prospect of winning them instead of merely answering them? The present state of our civilization as well as repeated Papal directives furnish

a convincing answer to such questions. We must concert with all of our fellow citizens of good faith to discover and pursue common objectives and incidentally help to dispel misunderstandings and assure an accurate grasp of differences.

These are some of the obligations of the layman and laywoman. We must be able to count upon the quality of their religious instruction, upon their courage, but above all upon their initiative.

THE CATHOLIC HOUR

1930—Seventeenth Year—1946

The nationwide Catholic Hour was inaugurated on March 2, 1930, by the National Council of Catholic Men in cooperation with the National Broadcasting Company and its associated stations. Radio facilities are provided by NBC and the stations associated with it; the program is arranged and produced by NCCM.

The Catholic Hour was begun on a network of 22 stations, and now carries its message of Catholic truth on each Sunday of the year through a number of stations varying from 90 to 110, situated in 40 states, the District of Columbia, and Hawaii. Consisting usually of an address, mainly expository, by one or another of America's leading Catholic preachers—though sometimes of talks by laymen, sometimes of dramatizations—and of sacred music provided by a volunteer choir, the Catholic Hour has distinguished itself as one of the most popular and extensive religious broadcasts in the world. An average of 100,000 audience letters a year, about twenty per cent of which come from listeners of other faiths, gives some indication of its popularity and influence.

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