

MAN'S MELANCHOLY SYMPHONY OF SELF

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"Man's self-consciousness has no other object than himself; when, therefore, man says God, he actually means man. In short, God has not created man in His own image, but man has created God in his own image and likeness . . ."¹



UNNOTICED for years in the woodpile column of a respectable newspaper lay the germinal seed of a significant story. The first noticeable offshoot of that neglected seedling now appears. The written word bears witness to the re-birth of a twice-told tale and the re-discovery of a radiant but neglected Star.

In answer to the call of the sea which comes eventually to all men, a youngster and his dad hoisted sail one evening for a bracing run on the water. For some time the skipper's son intently watched his father handle the wheel so that he was not caught unprepared when the order came: "Take over for a second, lad. I must go and have a look at my charts." As he was about to leave, the father paused for a moment and, pointing to a distant star, he added: "Steer by that star, son, and you'll be all right."

With all the confidence of a mariner who had sailed the seven seas the boy grasped the wheel. Here was the big opportunity he had been waiting for to show his ability. And as the phantom figures of a multitude of swashbuckling sea heroes from the past stood at his elbow in admiration, the evasive star overhead glided quietly across the evening sky—or so it seemed. Slowly yet surely, as if rebelling at the touch of the inexperienced helmsman, the boat veered from its course. When the young master gazed aloft again to seek his guide the star was not where it should have been. The boy scratched his head in perplexity as he peered up at the heavens. Suddenly he made a startling discovery; a confusing one too, for far behind him now he could recognize a familiar flicker. "That's a strange 'un," he thought to himself, "wonder how it happened. Gotta' do something about it, though. Hi, dad," he called, "better come and find me another star! I've sorta passed that one you gave me!"

¹ Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1940.

A similar story, though a living one, is to be found realistically portrayed in the world of men. For a "better star" is now being sought by men who have passed by, as outmoded, the Unchanging Star of their Christian heritage. A Star was born, begotten especially by God out of the depth of His Infinite Love for the direction of His home-coming sons. "God so loved the world, as to give His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, may not perish, but may have life everlasting." The pattern, the guiding principle, the star of certitude and hope for men in the shifting sea of human life is Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Just as a boat needs human guidance so, too, the children of this world who attempt to steer their way amidst the shifting current of life cannot find the star nor keep the course unless a helmsman points the way. The Vicar of Christ, the guide of the bark of Peter, is that helmsman. By divine power and the subordinated employment of human wisdom he knows the Star of human destiny. He knows, too, the course to follow. He is aware, also, of the weakness of the child-like hands which rest today upon the wheel. But the children's petulant pleas will go unanswered; he will not find another star, for there is no other Star of Salvation for individuals or for society, than Christ. He will point out again and again the Star of Christ, so long as there are those who have lost the way.

Despite the patient efforts of the Roman Pontiffs down through the centuries to our own day, men and nations have persisted in their human efforts to substitute another star, a "better star." Men had always watched enviously the skill of their God-appointed pilot. It was finally their pride and their over-confidence which culminated in mutiny against God's trust, His teaching Church. Even in their betrayal their helmsman would gently remind them of the words of St. Paul: "Seek those things which are above." Yes, my children, seek always that happiness which is eternal; aspire to it, embrace it, and you shall not lose the way. With the passing of the years he would ever continue to urge them to judge things in the light of supernatural principles, to keep their minds on the Star that is Christ. He does so even today.

Yet, the haughtiness of human judgment perseveres. Men have failed to heed the infallible voice of God's Vicar. And in failing to steer by his appointed star they have lost sight of God; in ceasing to be God-conscious they have now become self-conscious, centering their vision solely on themselves. The world, as if rebelling at the godless touch of its unskilled helmsmen, has veered sharply from its God-chartered course and is running wild. The terrifying speed of

this mad, suicidal run has been expertly clocked by the persistent labors of Doctor Sorokin of Harvard. "In few periods of human history," he records, "have so many millions of persons been so unhappy, so insecure, so hungry and destitute, as at the present time, all the way from China to Western Europe. Wars and revolutions, crime, suicide, mental disease, and other evidences of deep-seated social maladies flourish apace, some of them on a scale hitherto unknown. We are witnessing a veritable 'blackout' of human culture."² And the inexperienced masters of the world's destiny are asking themselves how it all happened. In childish querrulousness, they complain that when they took their eyes off the Star of Christ it did not remain in their sight; they thought it should obey their every whim, but it never moved. Their first bewilderment has given place to confusion and panic as they search in vain for a stable, reliable guide. Their search is futile because, though all agree that something must be done, they call out for aid, not to God, but to creatures as befuddled as themselves. Men have passed the Star given them by God. In its place they have fashioned a new star made to their own image and likeness.

The fatal consequence, all too apparent, is the chaos of the moment. World War II marks the wretched climax of a way of life which has failed. For centuries men have been content to pursue this way to the accompaniment of their godless theme. Progressively they have denied the Church of Christ, then Christ, their Star, and finally God. Above the din and confusion of global warfare and bloodshed, base selfishness has become the melancholy and militant refrain of man's futile pipings. Now when "man says God, he actually means man."

It was not always so. This inhuman state of modern creature existence is the very antithesis of the Gospel of the God-Man. The aim of Jesus of Nazareth was "to make a new world." "He came," says Cardinal Newman, "to regenerate it in Himself, to make a new beginning of the creation of God, to gather together in one and to recapitulate all things in Himself." Human history attests his triumph. His faithful followers, united under the inspiring standards of Christianity, did succeed in regenerating and recapitulating human society in Christ. From their common bond of union there was made "a new beginning of the creation of God" founded on love. And love was possible of fulfillment only because these Christian men and women looked upon themselves and upon each other as something infinitely more precious than "a psychoanalytical 'bag' filled with physiological

² Sorokin, *The Crisis of Our Age*, E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., New York, 1942.

libido." Is it any wonder that the modern "dead-line beater," peering through the maze of his neighbor's "physiological libido," is unable to perceive God's handiwork? The understanding, practical Christians were not satisfied with half-measures. Fully alive to the dignity of their Christ-like persons they consecrated not only themselves but everything about them to their proper end, Goodness Itself. Because of their profound realization that the human person was made by Love and for Love, they embraced with ease the rigorous discipline of Charity, their queen. How these Christians loved one another! Throughout the space of more than ten centuries men paid willing homage to their gracious queen. For them, Charity was the dominant note of a happy and harmonious relationship with their God.

Suddenly in the early years of the sixteenth century, this spiritual symphony of love was brought to an abrupt end. With the downbeat of a new hostile symphony another theme was introduced. But it lacked the harmony and spirit which had distinguished the first. Under the direction of a bungling, artless maestro, dissonant selfishness had displaced the melodious motif of love. When Martin Luther, in October of 1517, posted his "Ninety-five Theses" on the door of the Church at Wittenburg, the first movement of man's symphonic rhapsody of self began. The new tune, "sin strongly but believe more strongly" was enticing. If Jules Snodgrass and Sara Muffet have the faith; if they, the individuals, believe ever so firmly in a merciful, all-forgiving God, what need is there for further infallible authority? And since they do believe sincerely, they likewise may take for granted that God has spoken to them through the medium of the Scriptures. How logical then that they, the enlightened of the Lord, should be the final judges of what God meant for them. They will be henceforth the masters of their own destinies. God's revelation must hereafter conform to the pleasure of each member of the new religious proletariat—or else. Hail to the new freedom of religion! Hail to the new liberty of man!

The confusion resulting from this principle of private interpretation or of individual judgment can be most pointedly illustrated when even mundane documents are subjected to its precarious rule. Apply this principle, for example, to that body of laws dear to the heart of every American, the Constitution of the United States. What would be the disorder if every citizen was allowed to construe that document according to his own lights? It is for the very purpose of safeguarding the American people from the possibility of internal turmoil that the Supreme Court was provided as the ultimate authority, the su-

preme interpreter. Why, then, must God's laws be subjected to the vacillating foibles of His subjects? It has become the approved custom of the day to reject as spurious any dogma or divine truth once authority is invoked as an ultimate interpreter. Introduce into a religious argument today the declaration of the Catholic Pontiff or even the Scriptures themselves and once again the mocking cant of Calvary's deicides reechoes from out of the past. But merely mention that Professor Know-it-all "has said," or that Molly Dew-eye, the sob sister of the Daily Scream "claims," and the discerning, cautious modern will accept unequivocally any statements made.

What Jules and Sara did not realize centuries ago should be obvious to all now. To deny the authority of God's legitimate Spouse, His Church, is to open the way for anarchy—religious, moral and social lawlessness. Lacking the voice of infallibility, a religious sect must face the ultimate result: complete discord, fatal disintegration. The myriad of modern Protestant sects affirms their basic fallacy. The Bible, once the sole rule of faith for Protestantism, has long ago been discarded and in its place have arisen the many petty creeds of man's vain imaginings. No longer possessing an authoritative, much less divine, guide, the individual must become his own authority, his own judge of what is right and wrong, the author of his own moral code.

The accomplishments of these self-deluded authors will be recorded in history—on pages of blood. They have assumed authority over themselves but have become profligate and despotic. They have judged between right and wrong but have sinned against righteousness. They have edited their own moral code but at this very moment on all the battlefields of the world they are falling, victims of their own creative genius. "Without any compunction, remorse, regret, or compassion," writes Sorokin, "millions of guiltless people are uprooted, deprived of all possessions, of all rights, of all values, subjected to all kinds of privation, banished, or killed by bombs and bullets, simply because their own existence is an unintentional obstacle to the realization of a lust for power, for wealth, for comfort, for some sensate value. Rarely, if ever, have even cattle been treated with such cynacism."³

³ *ibid.* p. 64.

(Concluded in next issue.)