

fuller understanding of the whole story God is telling—a story which, indeed, is the story of your salvation.

—John Vianney Becker, O.P.

A PLEA FOR WISDOM

TO HIS MANY VENTURES in Christian apologetic, C. S. Lewis recently added "The Four Loves," which recalled an article written a few years ago denying Lewis a place as an effective apologist.¹ Labelling Lewis' attitude toward science and religion medieval and passé, the author apparently looked upon him as another St. Robert Bellarmine, and his antagonists as so many contemporary Galileos. Perhaps Lewis' message is not palatable to modern scientists, but it is not blindly reactionary; his words should not be dismissed out of hand in the name of "progress."

Lewis speaks strongly about the position of science in the world today:

There is something which unites magic and applied science while separating both from the "wisdom" of earlier ages. For the wise man the cardinal problem had been how to conform the soul to reality, and the solution had been knowledge, self-discipline, and virtue. For magic and applied science alike the problem is how to subdue reality to the wishes of men.²

Some of the forces of this passage must be charged to the hyperbole of expression which Lewis, as an accomplished artist, handles so well. Still, his position is basically sound. He is no mere Philistine reacting against and "blaspheming what he cannot understand," what he is unable to integrate into a pat traditional scheme of reality. Lewis' nostalgia for "earlier ages" implies a great truth which may be obscured by a too hasty judgment. We shall examine and underline this truth which is essential for man's sanity and his sanctity.

No thinking man readily makes sweeping statements of condemnation about modern science; there is too much truth and goodness in modern science and philosophy for that. But, one of the tendencies common to both of these disciplines does not ring true and, to this extent, is to be

criticized. This bent of science, an inclination or attitude no longer restricted to the man in the ivory tower, has become accepted unconsciously by a legion of popularizers and their followers. Since we are being led astray, we need a prophetic spirit to criticize and cry out for reform. A prophet is not concerned with the just. Not all who hear the cry need listen; it is a matter of degree. If the shoe fits, wear it.

When Lewis inveighs against "science," the word must be carefully understood. The real villain of the piece is so-called "technological thinking" masquerading under the impressive pseudonym of "science." The true scientific achievements of the age, both theoretical and practical, surely merit recognition and applause, but, unfortunately, they have given rise to a popular inference that utility, and utility alone, is the measure of knowledge. Lewis simply echoes a calm but forceful warning of Pope Pius XII:

The "technological concept of life" is therefore nothing else but a particular form of materialism, in that it offers as a final answer to the question of existence a mathematical formula and a utilitarian calculation. . . . Quite apart from the *religious blindness* which derives from "technological thinking," the man possessed by it becomes handicapped in his reasoning, precisely because he is the image of God. God is infinitely comprehensive intelligence, whereas "technological thinking" does everything possible to *restrain in man the free expansion of his intellect*.³

This statement of Pius XII is not a gentle one. Indeed, one might consider it a bit too damning and work up a counter-argument to take the sting out of it. The argument might run something like this. We know that every man is called to be the image of God, to participate in some degree of God's action—through nature and through grace. But, before God became Redeemer, He was and is Creator. Creation is a divine activity. Therefore engineers in design and development—men at the furthest reaches of technological advance—may be said to participate, in a purely analogous manner, in God's creative activity. Commonly speaking, their work is "creative." Unlike the omnipotent God, they must use preexisting matter, yet they fashion a form never before realized as such in nature, and this with considerable ingenuity and remarkable success. So runs the counter-argument, and a rather powerful one at that. But, here arises the precise problem. For the very reason that this "creative" activity is so absorbingly satisfying, it is difficult to keep it within proper bounds, to see it always as only one part of man's life and to remain assured that it is not literally divine.

From a technological concept of life, from a divinization of technics, there follow two evils which the Pope singled out: religious blindness, and the narrowing of man's intellectual range. This is Lewis' great truth: scientism blinds a man. The narrowing of man's intellectual range is the more radical of the two defects and we will examine it at some length later. Religious blindness, while it results from a darkening of the intellect, involves primarily a distortion in the will of man.

Bertrand Russell points to this distortion in the will:

Science has more and more substituted power-knowledge for love-knowledge and as this substitution becomes completed, science tends more and more to become sadistic. . . . The power conferred by science as a technique is only obtainable by something analogous to the worship of Satan, that is to say by the renunciation of love.⁴

The exhilaration which accompanies the creative process in technology easily leads to a false sense of values, and values are what attract the will. After mastering a tiny portion of the material universe, the technologist is inclined to extend his rule to non-material areas. He creates his own hierarchy. Completely absorbed in molding something lower, he has no wish to be molded himself by something higher. But love cries out for imitation of the beloved, and imitation demands subjection. A man who has ruled so powerfully the world of technology, is loath to serve and forgets how to love. This is one of the kernels of truth hidden in Lewis' science-fiction fantasies.

The more serious deficiency of a technological concept of life, which, because it often goes unnoticed is the more dangerous, has to do with the restriction of man's intellect:

Cooped up in vast towns, remote from nature and natural things, forced to earn a living by dull, uncreative work, often sick in body or mind or both, thinking of progress in terms of technics, of faster locomotion and improved plumbing, reading little more than the newspapers and pulp magazines; hardly aware that the life of the mind can mean more than the acquiring of utilitarian scientific, commercial facts, finding relaxation mostly either in unimaginative sensuality or in passive amusements: it is hardly surprising if such a society is sick, neurotic: and neurotic because uncreative, and uncreative because uncontentplative.⁵

There is a widespread tendency today to look at everything through

the eyes of technology, to see things in terms of utility. Gerald Vann identifies this limited outlook when he writes: "What is it that separates us from the child and the primitive? It is the abyss that lies between knowledge *about* things and immediate perception *of* things."⁶ A technological climate fosters a narrow view of creatures which sees them *only* as means to be used, rather than as things also to be known and loved in themselves, for their inner content of truth and goodness.

There are many ramifications of this outlook. We observe the practically exclusive concern of intellectuals for accidentals with a corresponding neglect of essentials. In much of contemporary philosophical thought, the major problem—in some cases, the only interest—is one of epistemology (the study of how we come to know reality), not one of ontology (the study of reality itself). In education, the corresponding emphasis is on method, historical and statistical, rather than on truths.⁷

The spirit of intellectual nihilism is gaining ground. It is frightening to think of the extent to which people are now being encouraged to banish from the minds of their children great questions as devoid of all meaning; to dispel the wonder which is a young mind's birthright; to confine their spirit to petty problems that can be answered once and for all to the satisfaction of reasoners incapable of raising a question to begin with. We now have a philosophy to show that there are no problems but those which it has shown to be no problem; and to decree that there is no philosophy other than one that is a denial of philosophy. Under the twinkle of a fading star, Hollow Men rejoice at a hollow world of their own making.⁸

Absorption in the useful dulls the mind's appreciation of the *wonderful*. Lewis speaks profoundly when he claims modern society stifles the wise man. To be wise, man must contemplate; to be contemplative, man must wonder.

The relegation of Cicero's *Haec Studia* to the closet of anachronisms, the neglect of classical philosophy, the disdain for looking into reality, reaches its zenith in the rejection of metaphysics.⁹ "Intelligence" means "seeing into," from *intus legere*. To see into reality as deeply as possible on the natural level has always been the prerogative of the metaphysician. Today, we are allowed a meta-logic, but not a metaphysics. The highest expression of natural wisdom, metaphysics has been forced to last place behind a growing list of positive sciences. Why? Maritain found the answer in Aristotle, who called metaphysics the supremely "useless" science.

Metaphysics cannot be used; it is to be sought not as a means of doing something else but as an end in itself, the contemplation of truth. "However, nothing is more necessary to man than this uselessness. What we need is not truths that serve us but a truth we may serve. For that truth is the food of the spirit."¹⁰

If philosophy and its defense has become primarily a matter of concern for the few professionals, what about the rest of us? Has this technological thinking filtered down to less academic areas? Yes, it has. We have already mentioned the tendency to treat things as merely useful rather than as worthy of respect for what they are in themselves.¹¹ This means that, in the concrete world of daily living, most men have lost a sacramental view of the universe, an appreciation of symbolism. All of nature is a great sacrament, a great symbol, a great sign; all things exist to instruct man in the ways of God. Perhaps the worst effect of an over-emphasis on technology is that man is practically cut off from the silent contemplation of nature. We have lost reverence for ourselves who are images of the Most Blessed Trinity, and for all other creatures beneath us which are in themselves signs that show forth the beauty of the Creator.

While it is true that in certain literary and psychiatric circles there is perhaps an undue exaggeration of the role of symbols in human life, symbolism remains a peculiarly captivating way of arriving at truth. A symbol is a thing which, when known leads to knowledge of something else—a vestige of a higher reality with a more profound meaning than is obvious at first glance.

The most familiar symbol is the metaphor. The metaphor has a great drawing power, for man delights in sensible representations and his mind and heart go out to the intelligible nugget of truth hidden in it. Such symbols abound in the Old Testament, in the parables of Our Lord, in the Sacramental Liturgy of the Church. Once we have grasped the literal meaning of the symbol (whether it be water, oil, fire, bread, the tree, or any of a hundred others), then we may return to the metaphor which compresses into a single striking image so much complexity of thought—as does a poem of Hopkins. The word comes alive, and images, appealing to the whole man through the five senses, storm the imagination and hold it more powerfully than the realities they serve to represent.

One danger in the use of metaphor lies in its highly subjective character, which can lead to error. The fact that metaphors have almost as many interpretations as there are interpreters provoked Aristotle to criticize severely Plato's excessive use of symbols in philosophy. Though there

may be some validity in the claims of Jung, for example, for the existence of universal metaphors (*archetypes*) common to the whole human race, still, it seems that this type of symbol needs careful explanation to be rightly understood.¹² Thus, as St. Thomas notes, Biblical metaphors never stand alone. There is always to be found, in some other passage, a literal statement of the symbolic meaning, lest the faithful be led astray by the vagaries of private interpretation.

There is a second type of symbolism—actually a less strict usage of the word *symbol*—that of proper analogy. Knowledge through analogy, perhaps less striking but more revealing, is described by St. Augustine: "And I said to all the things that throng about the gateways of the senses: 'Tell me of my God, since you are not He. Tell me something of Him.' And they cried out in a great voice: 'He made us.' My question was my gazing upon them, and their answer was their beauty."¹³ When we wrest ourselves away from the enveloping technological atmosphere and give ourselves to the contemplation of natural things, we come to a knowledge of the higher realities of which they are images. This is the ultimate concern of real science.

St. Paul said that we can come to know the invisible God through the visible wonders of his creation. Such knowledge demands that we look at nature and listen to it, that we open our minds to its order, harmony, and beauty. A scientist of the caliber of Einstein did this and so he could write: "Enough for me to experience the sentiment of the mystery of the eternity of life, and the inkling of the marvelous structure of reality, together with the single-hearted endeavor to comprehend a portion, be it ever so tiny, of the reason that manifests itself in nature."¹⁴ Another modern researcher is well on the way to the same discovery when he says:

I claim there is an equal beauty and grandeur to the picture of an atom of iron or copper or uranium which modern science has revealed. Even more beauty, perhaps, is to be found in the structure of a protein molecule. More still is in the structure of the gene as it is built up of spirals of nucleic acids all so ingeniously designed that the gene can make a copy of itself—can reproduce its kind. With all due respect, I claim there is as much beauty in such things as can be found in great paintings or fine literature or music.¹⁵

These words of a distinguished scientist may filter down to less perceptive men that they may receive the impetus to overcome the limits of their technological environment and begin in earnest the life of reason.

Scientism is narrow and closed; wisdom is wide and open. The wise man listens in wondering contemplation to the voice of nature. We may yet see a return to the popular consciousness of the concept of "The regenerate science . . . When it explained it would not explain away. When it spoke of parts it would remember the whole."¹⁶ This is the plea for wisdom from the pen of C. S. Lewis, a wise man who deserves to be heard.

—Thomas Le Fort, O.P.

¹ P. Deasy, "God, Space, and C. S. Lewis," *Commonweal*, 68:421-23. This article ends as follows: "Anything like a technologized Christian humanism is evidently repugnant to him; nor is there any likelihood of his seeing, in Fr. J. W. Moody's words, 'post-Medieval history, not as a progressive *secularization*, but as a gradual unfolding of an age of technology, which is part of the great and mysterious evolution in time of the universe devised by God.' Can a popular Christian apologist continue to be effective and relevant in our space age without such a vision? To ask the question, it seems to me, is to answer it." But this is to miss the point. Although Lewis is not so optimistic as a Moody or a Teilhard de Chardin, still he explicitly states his hope for the advent of "the regenerate science. . . . When it explained it would not explain away. When it spoke of parts it would remember the whole." Does this seem repugnant to "technologized Christian humanism?"

² Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, Macmillan, New York, 1947, p. 48. Lewis' strongest critique of "technological thinking" is the last volume of his allegorical trilogy, *That Hideous Strength*.

³ Pope Pius XII, *Allocution to the Sacred College*, Dec. 24, 1953.

⁴ Russell, *The Scientific Outlook*, Norton, New York, 1931.

⁵ Gerald Vann, O.P., "Holiness and Humanness," in *Spiritual Life*, Dec. 1958.

⁶ Gerald Vann, O.P., *The Heart of Man*, Longmans, New York, 1945, p. 15. A recurrent theme in Fr. Vann's writings, this position was recently exposed in his article "Relearning Symbols," in *Worship*, Nov. 1960.

⁷ Lewis criticizes an *exclusively* historical method in *Screwtape Letter* number 27: "The Historical Point of View, put briefly, means that when a learned man is presented with any statement in an ancient author, the one question he never asks is whether it is true. He asks who influenced the ancient writer, and how far the statement is consistent with what he said in other books, and what phase in the writer's development, or in the general history of thought, it illustrates, and how it affected later writers, and how often it has been misunderstood (specially by the learned man's own colleagues) and what the general course of criticism on it has been for the last ten years, and what is the 'present state of the question.' To regard the ancient writer as a possible source of knowledge—to anticipate that what he said could possibly modify your thoughts or your behavior—this would be rejected as unutterably simpleminded." (*The Screwtape Letters*, Macmillan, New York, 1943, p. 139).

⁸ Charles de Koninck, *The Hollow Universe*, Oxford Univ. Press, 1960, p. 77.

⁹ "These studies (in the classics of philosophy, literature, and history) nourish youth and delight old age; they are an ornament in prosperity, and furnish a refuge

and a solace in adversity; they are a joy at home and no hindrance abroad; they pass the night, travel afar, or go to the country with us" (*In Defense of Archaïs*).

¹⁰ Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, Scribners, New York, 1960, p. 4.

¹¹ "But even things command a certain kind of respect; they have a nature of their own and a goodness of their own. They should not be slighted as mere 'implements', as nothing other than objects of consumption. Modern man is no longer concerned with the intrinsic goodness or value of things, but exclusively with their capacity to increase comfort" (Rudolf Allers, "Technology and the Human Person," in *Technology and Christian Culture*, Catholic University Press, 1960, p. 31).

¹² An interesting and convincing application of the theory of analytical psychology (Jung) to the sacrament of Baptism is found in Beirnaert's essay, "La dimension mythique dans le sacramentalisme chrétien," *Eranos Jahrbuch*, 1949. Gerald Vann, O.P., and Victor White, O.P., are somewhat sympathetic to Jung, as they interpret him. On the other hand, a noted experimental psychologist, H. J. Eysenck, has this to say about universal symbols: "The main difference is that mental activity in sleep appears to be at a lower level of complexity and to find expression in a more archaic mode of presentation. The generalizing and conceptualizing parts of the mind seem to be dormant, and their function is taken over by a more primitive method of pictorial representation. It is this *primitivization* of the thought processes which leads to the emergence of symbolism. . . . This symbolizing activity is, of course, determined to a large extent by previous learning. To the patient who is being analysed by a follower of Freud, it would not occur to dream in Jungian symbols because he has not become acquainted with them. In general, symbols are relative to the education and experience of the dreamer, although certain symbols, such as the moon, are very widely used because they are familiar to almost all human beings" (*Sense and Nonsense in Psychology*, Penguin Books, 1958, p. 173).

¹³ *The Confessions*, Book 10, Chapter 6 (Trans. by F. Sheed).

¹⁴ *The World as I See It*, Philosophical Library, New York, p. 5.

¹⁵ L. A. DuBridge, "Exploring the Unknown," in *Frontiers in Science*, p. 254.

¹⁶ Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, *loc. cit.*

THE GLORIES OF DIVINE GRACE

IT IS CERTAINLY a great thing that man by grace should rise above all created nature; but it is something greater still that he should participate in the uncreated divine nature. To speak more precisely, man in the state of grace is so superior to all created things because he is so near to God. On account of this nearness he partakes of the prerogatives of