

Correspondence

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CHANGES TN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Sir,

Both the letters on this subject in the Summer issue of *Studies* quote Christ's promise about the Church, "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" for the purpose of lulling Catholic readers once more into a sense of security—false security, as I believe—after the stirring alarm so well sounded by Lois Lang-Sims in an earlier issue. Suppose that your two correspondents had been living in England in the year 1500 and had been told, by some Cassandra of the times, that in 1600 there would not be a single Roman Catholic church left in England. Would they not then have confidently put forward Christ's promise as an irrefutable proof that the prophecy could not be true? Nor does the fact that the situation has now changed from what it was in 1600 wipe out the fact that for two hundred years or more the English people, all but a very few privileged exceptions, were deprived both of Mass and, as far as this is possible, of the Blessed Virgin. In other words, *the gates of hell did prevail*, in a certain sense. This clearly cannot be the sense of Christ's promise; but it certainly seems, *mutatis mutandis*, to be the sense in which these writers interpret that promise.

There can be no doubt that the Church will remain until the end of time. But this does not mean that she will not become increasingly inaccessible to vast tracts of the so-called Christian world. Nor does it mean, unless some strong action is taken, that there will not be an increasing number of Masses which are invalidated by the heretical views, concerning the Sacraments, of the officiating priests. If the Church can never become rotten to the core, certain parts are already as rotten as can be—witness the Pope's continual protests—and it is the duty of the layman to be more and more discriminating, and more and more on his guard. Little could be more pleasing to the progressists than the kind of attitude which is betrayed by the remark "the Christian who is eager to grow in the love of God will go even to a 'guitar Mass' if nothing else is available", but it may well be doubted whether such an attitude is pleasing to God. In any case, it cannot be in accordance with the Will of Heaven that a man should deliberately attend, and therefore condone, the desecration of a sanctuary. If he cannot follow Christ's precedent and drive out the desecrators, then let him stay at home and pray for himself and for the Church. But let him raise his voice in protest afterwards and encourage others to do so.

At the end of the letter in question, despite the earlier quotation about the "gates of hell", the "rock" appears to be, not the Church, but the "modern technological civilization", to which the Church is to adapt herself. But is there not too much "writing on the wall" as regards the modern civilization, is it not far too precarious a thing to be made the centre of a "programme", even supposing that this were not the exact opposite of the true function of the Church? As your correspondent seems to admit, we are living in an extremity of decadence. Decadent also, in their own particular way, were the times

of Christ. If Christ is an example to be followed, let the Church judge and condemn our times as he did his; let her be uncompromising, relentless, adamant, terrible. Such language could not fail to have at least some effect, whereas the unctuous platitudes of "co-existence" and "accommodation" and "keeping in touch" merely serve as promoters of worldliness and soporifics for guilty consciences.

The Church has absolutely no precedent, in Christ and in his Saints, to do anything other than address herself to what is best in man; and this "best" is something which does not change. Not being "modern", it does not require any new language. On the contrary, to be evoked and sustained, it needs something in conformity with its own nature, something which is, precisely, like a "rock".¹ Particularly unfortunate therefore is the sentence "the message of salvation must be preached, and in a language which is comprehensible to the men of our time" for that is almost word for word the official pretext so often given for all those abuses that are listed by Lois Lang-Sims. The "men of our time" are not supposed to have any "better selves"; and their intelligence, which may not be on an average very great, is none the less grossly underestimated. It would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that the Bishops are tearing the fabric of the Church to shreds ostensibly on the grounds that "modern man" can no longer understand that "two and two make four". The real grounds no doubt lie in the obscure progressist and evolutionist persuasions to which so many dignitaries of the Church have succumbed, and in "unity at any price".

I do not wish to give the impression that I am unappreciative of the good things in John Sanderson's letter. What he says about the Eucharist itself, for example, is excellent; but the main point of both letters was to blunt the edge of an admirably sharp sword, and I find that hard to understand. The more such swords are raised, the easier it will be for the Pope and the conservative Bishops to take whatever action may be necessary in order to safeguard the heritage of the Church before it is too late.

London, 13.1.69

PETRAE DEFENSOR.

Dear Sir,

John Sanderson in his letter raises questions which go to the very root of today's problems, touching on the aimlessness and sense of loss that seem such an essential component of modern society at all levels. He suggests that the destructive effects of western civilization in its contacts with the ancient traditions arise from the deliberately anti-traditional intention with which modern science, technology and industry are promoted, but also from the fact that they are not compatible with these traditions. "Christianity, on the other hand, is compatible with whatever is positive in them (Western science and technology) . . . it is possible to conceive of a Christian technological society in which human activities are sanctified by the intention with which they are performed rather than by any explicit ritual".

First, I am not sure whether Mr. Sanderson is suggesting that Christianity is in some way essentially different, *and so superior to*, other traditional societies. Such an idea would not be, in the strictly etymological sense of the word, traditional. Secondly, in the society he conceives the sacred symbolism that permeates manual activities in all truly

traditional societies is completely lost. Professor Jean Servier (*L'Homme et L'Invisible*, p. 66, 1964) gives a very vivid example of this: Among the most humble homes in North Africa, the mistress of the house has a loom constructed of two rollers held together by two upright supports. The higher roller is called the roller "of the sky", the lower, "of the earth". These four components between them represent the universe. When the loom is set up the same offerings to friends and passers by are made as on a wedding, since weaving is a marriage of heaven and earth. The threads of the weft form two layers crossing each other at six points where reeds hold them in place. The points at which they cross are the spirits of the cloth and the reeds make the spirits corporeal. When the cloth is finished the threads are cut with the same prayer given when the umbilical cord is cut. Weaving is a work of creation, of begetting, and everything occurs as if weaving translated into simple language some deep mysteries of man's nature.

All this will be surprising only to those who regard weaving as nothing more than the construction of a piece of cloth, and who would regard Plato's analogy of cloth and bodies in the *Phaedo* as a merely dialectical device.

The traditional use of symbolism is a constant reminder of the ideal forms whose existence is quite independent of man, forms of which we on earth have only rather vague memories. It is this constant echoing of the good and the beautiful in every-day life that distinguishes the traditional society from today's. In all traditional activities sacred symbolism is omnipresent: every step is pregnant with metaphysical meaning at the same time as it is a step towards the fulfilment of a material achievement. Modern technology is not only completely devoid of higher content, but by its very nature suggests the opposite. Could anyone by any stretch of the imagination regard the construction of an internal combustion engine as a work of begetting, as expressing some deep mystery about man's nature? Or does it even suggest something impersonal, inhuman, and above all, quite undivine? A man who fills his work with machinery is more likely to think and live mechanically in his leisure hours, just as one whose each and every act contains hidden meaning sooner or later stumbles across it. Even if he never realises this meaning fully it will affect his whole life at every level.

Of course it is possible to come closer to God if your work is done in His name, and a mechanic whose work is done out of love will undoubtedly sanctify his whole life through his intention and his labour in realising it. But how much more direct his path to sanctification had his profession continually reinforced his intuition instead of reminding him constantly of the meaningless repetitiveness of it all. At best his work would be irrelevant to his life, instead of being an intimate part of it, since any other work done in God's name would serve as well. Most people's work today must be of this nature: a hindrance to the growth of the spirit which can only be overcome with a deliberate and conscious effort of will that only a few can make, since only a few know it must be made.

The question then arises, can a traditional society be built where most of its members must make a considerable spiritual effort to overcome the actively negative aspects of their work? If a traditional society is one "in which every aspect and action of human life has a ritual character opening possibilities of spiritual development to members of the tradition", and if, in a mechanical and technological society most people's principal activity, their work, does not help them to find or even positively inhibits them from finding these possibilities, it would seem that modern technology itself is in some way

essentially false, and so evil. At any rate, technology, science and industry as we know them in the West would clearly be meaningless from a spiritual point of view, and so are incompatible with a truly traditional society.

It is a truism to say that objects constructed with modern machinery, while more numerous, are of lower quality. It is not so widely understood that the construction of objects produced in this way is determined entirely by the need to be as cheap as possible. For instance, the desire to make as many tables as possible leads to the choice of a particular shape for the table tops, so that the greatest number of these for a given surface area may be cut from a piece of wood. Instead of constructing the table in a symbolic shape, it is cut in a convenient one, which, instead of reminding us of the good and the beautiful reminds us of the slick and the sleazy. This, with the help of skilful advertising becomes an established style which is incidentally, or perhaps even deliberately, anti-traditional. Such products could not be used in any truly traditional society, since their construction and use, however much dedicated to God, are not symbolic.

This in turn suggests that what Mr. Sanderson meant by "a Christian technological society in which human activities are sanctified by the intention with which they are performed", is one in which evil or false works, or at the very best works of completely neutral colouring, are dedicated to God. Of course work done in this spirit will bring us nearer to God (witness the legend of St. Christopher). Still, such a society is certainly not a traditional society, nor perhaps a very stable one. It is precisely because the Church has been content with aspiring towards a "Christian technological society" that there are grounds for grave concern: a truly Christian society must be a truly traditional one, and therefore it cannot be a technological one. And perhaps the truly traditional societies destroyed by contact with Western technology were destroyed, not because they could not, but because they would not, compromise as Christianity has. It is in such compromises that the path to destruction lies, as is shown by the increasingly de-Christianised, de-Mythologised un-Godly society which has grown in direct measure with our increasing interest in purely material prosperity.

Tidmarsh, Berks., 9.2.69.

C. P. MATHEWS.

IN DEFENCE OF TEILHARD DE CHARDIN

Sir,

It is a safe rule that so long as a writer on religious subjects is affirming beliefs (whether his own or other peoples') he is expressing the truth; but when depreciating other peoples' beliefs, his word is not to be trusted. An alien point of view can never be understood without love or empathy, which, in practice, forbid disparagement of any religious belief honestly held. Conversely, under appropriate influences, religious differences practically cease to exist, as readers of S.C.R. are gratefully aware. But, regrettably, no one of your learned contributors, it would seem, has any love or empathy for Teilhard de Chardin. If he is mentioned by any of them, whether in or outside your columns, it is only to be sniped at. Thus, one whom it would be disrespectful to name in such a context has referred to "the Darwinism of Teilhard de Chardin", which is surely a

grave misrepresentation, the truth being that Teilhard is hated by Darwinians precisely for his exposition of a non-Darwinism evolutionary process directed by Divine Providence. Would you allow an unlearned but appreciative reader of your journal to submit a few reasons why Teilhard and his ideas should be accorded more tolerant treatment in a periodical dedicated to promoting harmonious relations between worshippers of the Godhead.

1. The Sanctity of his life—a life to meditate upon; an allegory of fulfillment in frustration. A giant among scientists, a gentle priest, faithful, without resentment, to the vow of obedience which forbade him to teach or publish during his lifetime the message he believed he was destined to deliver. The facts are given, unsentimentally, in Robert Speaight's biography, for anyone interested.
2. Christianity was originally a religion of hope, and has been swinging between optimism and pessimism since its foundation. Christian truth in abundance is to be found in the writings of all your regular contributors, but not much emphasis on hope. Teilhard is essentially among the optimists. In spite of the state of the world, he persists in applying to life of all kinds, on every level, a doctrine of hope which, so far as human life is concerned, could hardly be more succinctly summarized than in two of Shakespeares' most familiar lines :

Hamlet There's a divinity that shapes our ends
Rough-hew them how we will.

Horatio That is most certain.

Teilhard designates the cosmic aspect of this principle Orthogenesis, and the long-term hope in it—echoing and revivifying the cosmic hope St. Paul confided in his letter to the Romans (Ch. 8, 19-23)—could be said to balance the gloom at the opposite pole of Christianity. There is, of course, a middle way between polar opposites. One can share (while realizing the truth in) both gloom and hope.

3. Students of comparative religion who may complain that *The Phenomenon of Man* has little to say to a man seeking God in solitude, have perhaps yet to discover Teilhard's devotional works—*Le Milieu Divin* and *Hymn of the Universe*—which already have brought to thousands, in all parts of the world, a warming consolation and help corresponding to that which Thomas A Kempis's *Imitation of Christ* provided for former generations.
4. The impact on Traditionalists of Teilhard's emergence as a Christian Evolutionist may be compared to the sensation produced by Galileo on the announcement of his adherence to the Copernican theory, threatening to undermine a geocentrically-orientated Orthodoxy. Galileo's theology may or may not have been as shaky as Teilhard's (if, as alleged, his in fact is shaky); but it certainly did not satisfy the ecclesiastical authorities of the day, although, after some re-thinking, the Church was enabled to accommodate itself to Galileo's notions about the movements of heavenly bodies. Without forcing the analogy, may I suggest that any deficiencies in Teilhard's theology are likely to be repaired, sooner or later, by neo-Teilhardians of the Catholic Faith, without damage or prejudice (whether sooner or later) to the case for Evolution under Providence.
5. The chief weakness of Teilhard de Chardin is in the dimension of esotericism. It is not a weakness that in any way impairs the validity of his beliefs or his prophetic vision. It is rather, I suggest, a challenge. Let it be admitted that God the Creator is

not conspicuously present in *The Phenomenon of Man*. A Darwinian, refusing in his blindness, to take Teilhard any more seriously than he takes the first chapter of Genesis, may not be so far out. Both accounts of the Creation are true. A marriage between Teilhard and the author of Genesis, under the authority of someone knowledgeable in the traditions of esoteric interpretation embodied in the Old Testament would, I will dare to say, at least neutralize the religious "case" against Orthogenesis. (The hint is offered to students of the Zohar who can pray and fast).

6. Finally, Sir, you and your associates are undoubtedly going along with Teilhard, all the way, whether you like him or not. You are in the vanguard of a movement advancing in the noosphere towards Point Omega (under whatever language one may choose to describe the operation). The common signs are increasing and deepening consciousness with expanding compassionate sensitivity, as exemplified in the inspired researches of Frithjof Schuon with which could be bracketed many articles appearing in recent issues of your Journal.

Hine illae lacrimae—and hence this letter.

London, 31.1.69.

H. F. RUBINSTEIN.

(Original editorial inclusions that followed the essay:)

"Fashion" itself, an essentially modern invention, is in its real significance something not entirely devoid of importance: it represents unceasing and aimless change, in contrast to the stability and order that reign in traditional civilizations.

René Guénon.

¹ Until Vatican II no one seemed to doubt this. Even Pope John, who was himself scarcely a conservative, forbade the Bishops "to dream of altering the liturgy," and was continually affirming, in favour of Latin, the unfitness of the ever-changing modern languages to be the vehicles of Eternal Truths.