

I HAVE ONLY ONE THEME: CHRIST*

By MOST REV. ARCHBISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN

T. S. Eliot, the poet, said that, "Today men dream up systems so that we will not have to be good". We talk about renewal. It is a very comfortable subject, first of all, because it refers to something outside ourselves—structures establishment, the Church, the way we dress, where we live, and whether we can do "our thing". Renewal has another advantage: you can discuss it. You never have to make a personal decision; we are all out of the firing line. The trouble is out there.

So in the Church today, it is very much like the story of the court which decided, in the presence of the king, to have a parade of all of its costumers. Various men were hired—one to wear a hunting costume, another a sport costume, another a court, another a diplomatic, another regal. Hundreds of men passed by with hundreds of different uniforms and finally a little boy who was there said, "Look, the king is naked". So I wonder if we have forgotten the King.

We talk too much today about the Church. Notice when you try to buy a book. Almost all the books are about the Church, and they are against it. (Generally, if you read one you read them all). Very few are about Christ, about the King. So we are going to talk about the king, not to convince you—you are already convinced. That is why you are here. You are an elect, a select group, a credit to the Church. What a joy it is to look out upon you and to see that you are identifiable as those consecrated to the King.

My good Sisters, we think we know all about Him. We know all about Him from books—yes, the way we have been taught—but let us see if we really know Him. In the sixteenth

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chapter of Matthew, Our Lord asked the most important question. In the world no question is answered until this one is answered. "Who am I? First He asks the Gallop Poll: "Who do men say that I am? What is the percentage". "Twenty-nine percent, John the Baptist; sixteen percent, Elijah; Thirty-two percent, Jeremiah; and the rest one of the prophets". So He is a man. "Who do you say?". The twelve — no answer because they were fighting among themselves. And God illumines one of them who steps out of the line and says, "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God." That was right! He is man and He is God. Now this is the theology. This is the hypostatic union; this is the way we meet Christ, all of us.

Now we have what man says of Him. What does He say of Himself? This is the question we have to answer: who does He say He is? He says, "I am Ebed Yahweh; I am your suffering servant. I have come to handle guilt for sin, and I am going to Jerusalem; I am going to be delivered over to the Gentiles; I am young to be crucified; and the third day I am going to rise again." And just as soon as Peter heard this, he said, "Listen, we are willing to have a dying, divine Christ, but we are not willing to have a suffering one. We want no victim. We want to talk about free equals; but we do not want to talk about victimhood". Why Satan? Because Satan tempts one away from the cross. The Gospel of last Sunday gave three short cuts away from the cross. Firstly, follow your taste, obey your instinct. Secondly, propagandize and follow technology; people want wonders; throw yourself from the steeples. And thirdly, theology is politics; the kingdom of the world is mine; you can win all this without paying any attention to guilt.

So who is Our Lord? He is the victim for the world of sin. Now this is Christ. This is what he says of himself. And He called you and He called me to share that life. There follow some consequences from this for our spiritual lives. I will see how many I can develop in a short space of time.

IDENTIFICATION WITH CHRIST

We have to be identifiable. That is first. In the Incarnation God Took upon Himself an individual human nature from Mary. Because it was never capped, limited by a human personality, it can absorb every nature in the world that will give himself or herself to Him. And so in our spiritual life Christ says to us, "I need other human natures. I will have no other

eyes in the world except your own; no other lips but yours. Would you give me your human nature?". When you give it, give it. And give it so much that when you renew My sacrifice you can say (the secondary meaning of the words of the consecration), "This is my body; this is my blood". We are not keeping back our intellect; it is captured by Him. And we are not keeping our will; we are not singing the song, "I want to be me". I don't want to be me; I want to be His. The more totally I am His, the more He can do with me.

If I had a pencil, and wanted that pencil to write "God" it would be responsive to me. It would be a supple instrument in my hand to my will. It would be flexible. I could do anything with it. Suppose, however, that the pencil had a consciousness of its own, and when I wanted to write "God", I wrote "dog". It would be a useless pencil. And, Sisters, *the reason we are losing our effectiveness in the world is that the people are not seeing that we are Christ's instruments.* And they know it. They know it by our actions; they know it by our dress; they know it by our talk. The instinct of the laity is infallible about us priests. Any individual judgement of a lay person may be awry; but the corporate judgement is right. They know us. And they want us right. And believe me within the next twenty years, they are going to set us right. They set the bishops right in the Council of Constantinople, and they will do it again, because they want us to be what we are supposed to be — His. *This is why we must spend at least one hour a day in meditation — at least, an absolute minimum. It takes fifteen minutes to slough off the world. We have to first escape the world, then we have got to inscape into it so that we interiorize Christ. We put Him into our consciousness in meditation and that seeps down into unconsciousness and comes out in the way we teach, in the way we act, in the way we love.* This is our first practical conclusion of being a follower of Christ who is a suffering servant, the slave of humanity. We are the slave of humanity, helping Him to remove the stain of guilt in His name. That is our first role.

RELATION TO THE WORLD

Our second role is in relation to the world. We have been too separated from the world. In the Vatican Council the world came into the Church through the pen, and the Church went into the world as Paul VI was crowned outside in the piazza of

St. Peter's. We have been too separated from suffering humanity, from the sick and the socially disinherited, from those who are calling for the Church. Those who plead, "We have to busy ourselves with the world", are right-half right. We know that, first, we are Christ's. Once we are His, then we become useful to the world, then and only then.

In the story of Martha and Mary, there is found not the distinction between the contemplative and the active life. This story follows the story of the Good Samaritan. And lest some would conclude from the Good Samaritan, that simply because the liturgists, the priest and Levite, were on their way to liturgical worship in the temple and ignored the world, that therefore, we have to give up entirely the divine and devote ourselves totally and solely to the world, Our Blessed Lord followed up that story with Martha and Mary to remind us that there is limit to activity. And that is why He said to Martha, "Martha, listen. Surely, we have to live. I am willing to eat a thousand island salad but not provided you go through a thousand different kinds of legalities. Believe me there comes a time when you must sit at my feet. You are too active. You are too much engaged in work."

In the gospel of next Sunday we have the Transfiguration. Peter wanted to stay up in the mountain. Our Lord said, "No you have to go down. There is frustration. There is evidence that there is half-witness. There is a distraught father down below in that valley". And when He got down, what did He find? He found nine of His apostles absolutely helpless in the face of driving out the devil. Our Lord gave to His apostles the power to drive out devils and here were nine helpless men. And this father came to our Lord, "Maybe you can help me; maybe you can help me". And what did Our Lord say to these apostles? He said, "How long do I have to suffer with you? You have no faith. That is why you cannot drive out devils. Why are you so intent on taking care of the distressed and the mentally destitute and so forth, if you do not have any faith, if you are not really close to me-". And I tell you, Sister, that if we simply think that what we have to do is to busy ourselves in the social order without staying close to Christ, we are never going to do His work, as effectively as the Communists or the Secularists or the Humanists, because we have already failed before we start. We are like Gehazi. Gehazi was the servant of one of the Old Testament prophets who was to take the rod and

to go and heal, and he could not heal. He had all the instruments, worthless.

What was the first word of Our Lord's public life? "Come, Come, Come. Come to me; learn of me. The branches cannot live without the vine. Without me you can do nothing. Come". What was the last word of Our Lord's public life? "Go! Go into the world. Now you will be effective simply because you have come. You learn of me—caught my spirit, caught my fire—and now you can go into the world and not become secularized and not deny me as Peter did when a girl came up to him as he warmed himself by the fire and said, "You have been with the Galilean. And he said, "No, I don't know Him, no I don't know Him. I don't dress like Him; I don't talk like Him; I don't identify myself with Christ". So first we come then we go and then we are effective and we have power.

This is the source of our scandal today. Believe me the Lord takes us at His word and our word when we say we are His. And we have to live intimately and closely with Him. *And that is why I say, Sisters, that our big problem today is not the Church. The Church will settle itself once we get back to Christ. When we live close to Christ the Church will begin to grow again and we will begin to get vocations.* If we are not with Him, we will not stop the apostasy until we get back again to Him. It is the only thing in the world that works. Those nine—nine apostles were down below after Our Lord came down from the mountain of the Transfiguration—they were the Church. They symbolized priests; they symbolized nuns—ineffective—no faith. So I have only one theme: Christ.

Sisters, I am travelling the country from one end to another giving priest's retreats, talking in secular universities (I do not go to Catholic ones very much). Secular universities: I have been in forty of them in the last eight or nine months. They are looking for something. They have not found the answer in just the rock stories or music about Jesus. One of the New York papers this morning said: "There is a kind of religious ritualism instead of spirituality". But in any case, they are reaching out. And there is only one salvation and there is no other name except heaven by which we can be saved except Christ and Him crucified. And it is a challenge to young people. They want to hear it! And that is why I say you have to begin to be His totally, completely. Then we need not fear for the world.

KENOSIS

Do you think we have time for another point? And now I am hesitating to which one to give you. Oh yes! I think one of the most important texts in Scripture for these days. In the second chapter of St. Paul's letter to the Philippians (I recently heard someone read, "the epistle to the Filipinos"), verses six and following, St. Paul tells us, "Christ emptied Himself, taking upon Himself the form of a slave — not servant, slave—and became subject to death for our sakes". The Greek word for death is "kenosis". He put off His glory — we almost have that whole Second Philippians in St. John's description of what Our Lord did the night of the Last Supper — He got up from the table, took off His outer garment, girded Himself with a towel which was the mark of a slave, got down and washed the dirty feet of His disciple, poured water, wiped them. That was like rising up in heaven and throwing off His glory, girding Himself with the towel of humanity, pouring out His blood, and washing our souls and sanctifying them with the Holy Spirit.

CHRIST'S HOLD ON YOU

Do you think that would be humiliating? What is then for God to take upon Himself a human form — limiting Himself to human qualities, subjecting Himself to human birth, growing never speaking the WORD but speaking words, subjecting Himself to pain? Has God ever died, ever suffered? You ask these questions and you have the answers. God suffered and died. Was God hungry? Did He ever go without food as we do? Does He know what it is to be born in slum? Was He ever the victim of totalitarian regime? Did He have to run from a political tyrant? Was He ever among betrayers? He ever have His lips blistered with a kiss? Did He know what it was to have a migraine headache? Did He know what it was to be wounded as people are wounded in war, in automobile accidents?

So He took upon Himself our misery and then He had to spend the rest of His life with men — all of them from the wrong side of the tracks except one, and he was the one who betrayed Him. And so on the night of the Last Sup-

per He said to Philip, "Philip, Philip, have I been all this time with you, and still you do not understand". And now this is the humiliation of the Son of God. This is our suffering servant. This is our master. This is our King. He is the one to whom we have communicated ourselves. How effective are we? We are effective just to the extent that He has mastery over us. If you teach school, if you rule, if you work for the poor, regardless of what it is, your effectiveness will depend entirely on how much of a hold Christ has on you. So that the reason we are not sometimes more effective is because we do not let Christ get a hold of us. We are not open enough. We keep secret guard in the back of our hearts. We lock Him out of the house. Do you remember when the Old Testament prophet came to the widow? Her sons were about to be sold to the creditors. He said, "What do you have?". She said, "I have one vessel of oil". "Go out to the neighbours to gather up all the vessels and crocks that you can". And the prophet told her to pour the oil. And the oil poured, and poured and poured, and it did not stop. Finally she said to her son, "Get me another vessel". He said, "There is no more". And the oil stopped. *That oil is the spirit of Christ who comes into us to possess us. And so to be filled with Him, the condition is that we empty ourselves.*

GETTING "WHOLE" AGAIN

Sisters, this is our problem today. It is not renewal. The word renewal is not found in the New Testament in relationship to any kind of structure or dress. It is found only in relationship to two things: one, "Be infants"; and secondly, "Become a new creature. Listen, we don't need renewal, we don't need renovation, like around a house. We have got to get whole again. We are like Nicodemus who said, How can I be born?". *Well we have to be born again, not just be renewed.* We have a great enemy outside — the devil and his cohorts. He is very real. Theologians do not talk about the devil; psychiatrists do. The two greatest psychiatrists in the world are captured by the devil in modern society. We don't talk about it. We don't believe it anymore. We don't believe in guilt and hence we don't talk about Christ and about sin and about guilt. We have an enemy to fight.

GOD'S WAY

Our ranks are decreasing. Maybe that is the way God wants it. Maybe He is doing to us What He did to Gideon. He told Gideon to go out and capture the Midianites, 65,000. Gideon had an army of 30,000. God said, "Your army is too great. Tell the cowards among them to leave". Do you know how many cowards there were? 20,000-two-thirds. He had 10,000 left. God said to him, "Send them to the river; watch them drink" Many of them threw themselves prone and drank from the river. And others ran along the river and tapped up the water like an animal. They drank in the manner of the dog. And God said, "That is your army. Now go out, and I am with you". Sisters, God is thinning our ranks. You are the army of Gideon. You are the elect. And the Lord is counting on you. The very fact that you have come here from all over the world, all over the United States, is an indication that you have felt in your own hearts that there has to be rebirth, that we have to get back to Christ; get back to His cross. We are suffering from a disease of staurophobia. "Stauros" in Greek is "cross" and "phobia" is "fear" — staurophobia. Discipline, cross, penance, excentrated decivilization — we never thought of that, just of society, always our selves. *But let us give ourselves to Him and then we will be effective in the world and will really renew the Church, renewed by our being reborn in Christ. God bless you.*

TRIBUTE TO MSGR. JOVELLANOS

"(The) services of Monsignor Jovellanos for the good of the soul and even of the body of every inhabitant of Tondo cannot be measured by time nor can it be equalled by any earthly treasure. No one can count the number of souls borne by him into heaven, delivered by him from the sorrows of the heart and of the body, and brought by him to goodness, holiness and salvation."

Rufino Cardinal Santos, D.D.