

Childlike or Childish?

The Faith of a Modern Catholic.

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To begin with, let us consider two texts of the New Testament. The first is our Lord's own word: "Except you all be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven." The second is from the great apostle, St. Paul: "When I was a child, I thought as a child and understood as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things..."

Now, what are we going to make of this? Jesus Christ Himself says we are to be like children: and He returns to His theme more than once. You remember His strong rebuke to the disciples who wanted to keep the youngsters away from Him, ending up with, "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven"? And the special curse He had for those who corrupted the little ones? As for the Apostle — it's true that his immediate purpose is to show how God's revelation widened out into the "fulfilment of the Law" in the Gospel when the hour was ripe. Still, it's clear enough, in his own writings, that he had a grasp of the Faith that was far from being simple in any "childish" sense. He was a great theologian and a subtle thinker and debater, thoroughly adult in his intelligence and imagination and emotion in the things of the spirit. And, of course, he was only the first of a long line of saintly doctors who were also brilliant philosophers and masters of a vast variety of knowledge; It seems absurd to speak of the wise Faith of such men as St. Irenaeus, Origen, St. Augustine or St. Thomas Aquinas — to name only a few — as being that of "a child." The Church has always encouraged the development of adult learning and intelligence in her children, and she has seen the need of using human minds as well as hearts in order to penetrate deeper into the mysteries of God's revelation to man.

Has she been wrong in this—as some Protestant critics hold — and falsified the "Simple Faith" of the Gospel by the sophistications of the learned? And if she is right, how is the word of Christ about His followers being "childlike" to be reconciled with the development of adult intelligence in regard to the truths of Faith? Well — if we look into things a little, I think we shall find, not only that the seeming contradiction between "childlike" and "adult" fades away, but also that actually an educated man cannot retain the "childlike" faith which Christ wants, unless he "puts away childish things" and becomes a Christian with a properly "grown up" approach to the realities of man's nature and destiny, as taught by the Church.

The Fading Vision.

From the first, the teaching Church has understood that when Our Lord spoke as He did about little children, He was praising certain features which are normal in the very young, but which we tend to lose as we pass into adult life. There is a personal sweetness and innocence, lost later through the sin that distorts and hardens the character. There is the simplicity of faith which the child places in his parents and those who care for him — an image of the undoubting confidence which the believer ought to have in his Divine Father. And then, there are the quick joys in life of the child — his passionate clinging tenderness to those he loves — his swiftness in sorrow for his small faults,

and his readiness to forgive and forget the offences of his companions -- his natural sincerity, humility, and readiness to learn. It isn't difficult to see, is it, why the good child should be selected by Christ as a "miniature," so to speak, for the imitation of the true Christian?

But added to this, I think, there is something else, which is often missed. The normal child has a natural aptitude for the "Vision Splendid" of the Faith on his own childish level. He dwells in a world in which nature is filled with fairies and romance and magic and mystery: and he finds no difficulty in grasping the idea of the other, invisible world of which his Faith tells him — where God lives, with Our Lady and the angels and saints, all actively interested in his affairs, anxious to help him in fighting the wicked spirits who want to make trouble for him — just like the bad fairies in his nursery tales. As Wordsworth put it: "Heaven lies about us in our infancy." The truths of religion are close, clear and vivid in our small, bright world, where nature merges easily into "Super-nature."

The normal experience of fallen men is that this magic wonder of childhood fades as we grow older "into the light of common day." Only a few poets, or very wise simple folk like St. Francis, Fra Angelico and G.K. Chesterton, seem to be able to retain it as part of their normal experience. "The world is too much with us" — the world of material reality, with its mechanical-seeming laws, and its cares, responsibilities, and monotonies — as we plunge into the struggle for living. Our own body weighs us down with its demands and deficiencies; so that, as we grow from childhood to adolescence, and then to manhood or womanhood, the "Shades of the prison house" close gradually round us, dulling the brightness of that first wonderful vision — how wonderful, we realise only when it has passed away.

To some extent, this is hardly to be avoided — it is part of the price our race must pay for the eating of "The fruit of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste brought death into the world, and all our woe."

But we have to beware lest, with the magic vision of childhood, we lose also our childhood's firm grasp of spiritual Reality. We are in danger of doing this, if our growing intelligence is not applied to the truths of Faith as well as to the things of this world of time and space: and this is above all necessary in the age in which we now live.

The Secular Delusion and Spiritual Reality.

The world of to-day is obsessed with the delusion that the only certain Reality is that of the world of physical experience, and that anything beyond that world is mere wishful dreaming and myth-making. This view is not commonly stated in downright fashion — except by materialists — but it is implied tacitly in the secularising of our public life, in our treatment of "religious opinion" as simply a matter of private taste of no real social significance, and in the general assumption that all human problems are to be solved on the natural level, and that the "common good" is fully expressed in terms of politics, economics and social hygiene. For the typically modern community — in particular the Australian community — God is an absentee Who can, in practice, be ignored.

Even those who have been brought up as Christians, and gone to Christian schools, do not find it easy to avoid being affected by this godless scale of values in the world in which we now live — with consequences which we shall see shortly. We find, it difficult even to imagine the sort of world in which our forefathers lived only a few centuries back — a world of which remnants still exist here and there in Europe and America, though it is being rapidly overwhelmed by the tide of change.

In that society, every man and woman was made constantly aware of the Divine, spiritual pattern of Reality within which the present order of “Middle Earth” was set. It was accepted without question: its presence was assumed in the shaping of laws and institutions, in the conventions of social life, in the designing of work and recreation, and even of gossip and tales. Religion was the principal theme of artistic expression, whose main purpose was to adorn the Church and its ceremonies and festivals “to the glory of God.” The streets and houses were filled with images, pictures and symbols to remind men of the unseen world of Faith. The chief task of the teacher — whether in schools or universities — was to form young minds through the knowledge of Christian truth and righteousness, and to train men to think clearly in those things which concerned “man’s chief end” as God’s creature. The crown of the “Sciences” was theology, towards which the seeker of wisdom ascended by way of philosophic thought.

At a time when men lived and thought like this, the adult world was able to keep, to a large extent, the spiritual “realism” which we associate today, with childhood — knitting the vision of Faith into the substance of their daily lives. The mental growth of the plain man was a harmonious process, a larger understanding of the lower world of nature being accompanied by a more intelligent grasp of the higher spiritual realities. The result was that the wisdom of the full-grown, educated Christian was “childlike” in the true sense — being, as it was, the flowering of the seed of truth contained in the vision of childish innocence.

“Dwarfish” Christianity.

The modern Christian tends to lose this “childlike” integrity and simpleness of Faith, because his religious way of thought is stunted, remaining “childish” while his secular development goes ahead. Too often, he never gets beyond the “teen age,” or even a lower stage of mental growth, as regards his grasp of religious truth: and this causes a sort of internal disintegration which may have very grave consequences indeed. The so-called “truths of Faith” begin to look, to him, like fantastic notions belonging to a fairy-tale world.

Thus, an English headmaster of a famous Quaker school recently admitted that most of his boys of seventeen or eighteen regarded God as “a myth like Father Christmas.” And this sense of religious unreality comes inevitably to affect the moral code of the individual.

The Christian commandments and sanctions may come to seem a primitive system of “taboos,” some of which are flatly against nature or common sense, reinforced by an iron penal code of damnation which revolts his sense of justice.

The personal picture of God which he has formed in childhood has become hopelessly inadequate from the point of view of his mature mind. His childish idea of the Fall of Man and the Atonement now appears fantastic, with its paraphernalia of a magical garden, winged and haloed celestial fairies with swords, wicked demons and so forth. All this seems hopelessly unrelated to the “real life” of his daily thinking and experience: and the same is true of the traditional ceremonies of the Church — its network of sacrament and sacramental through which he receives an imperceptible gift called “grace.”

He may be aware, vaguely, that the “scientific” objections against Faith are not conclusive: but, if he knows anything about the universe and its story, as presented in the light of modern research, he may well have an uncomfortable sense that this “open Universe” where his own world rolls, infinitesimally tiny, in the light of a million million suns, is somehow inconsistent with the world-picture presented by his Religion, as he knows it. The account of a planetary evolution, stretching

back through uncounted aeons, does not fit in at all well with the story of Creation in Genesis, as he recalls it from his schooldays.

The Danger of Disintegration.

All this, to be sure, need not mean that the man will lose his Faith. The power of Divine Grace will not fail him, while he frequents the Sacraments, and makes a real attempt to keep contact with God through prayer. And — even in the natural order — the hold of a traditional system of belief and conduct, imbibed in childhood and reinforced by vivid and affectionate memories of home and school, is very strong indeed. If the adult is busy, or not much given to reflection on matters outside his daily round of activities, he may seldom or never be troubled by the problem of reconciling the faith of his childhood with the world-view of his grown-up life in this modern age. Even so, his social conduct as a Christian is almost inevitably affected by the fact that his religion and everyday life are in separate compartments, and at different stages of development. He will tend to accept secular standards and views without thinking, to adopt a secular outlook on public affairs, and to find it irritating when the Church “interferes” in matters of business or political life, or makes personal claims upon him which he finds socially inconvenient. The Catholic Faith is the system to which he adheres; he observes his religious obligations with formal loyalty, and has no thought of abandoning them. But he has no vital interest in “that side” of his life — it is the lesser, static section of it, while his heart and mind are bent on secular concerns. Instinctively, such a man assimilates his colour, like a chameleon, to the background of the paganised life of our time, and avoids allowing his Faith to become apparent. He slides out of discussions into which religion may enter, both because he doesn’t want to be “compromised,” and because he is aware that he may appear foolish — because he doesn’t “know the answers” — and that criticism may stab him in a deadly fashion. The treasure of Faith remains hidden in his breast: but it has not been “inwardly digested” into his life — it is not growing with him, and radiating its light and power by his means. To hold it, as the man held the talent in the parable, by burying it — that is all his thought. The idea of the apostolate, as a personal duty applying to himself, has never seriously entered his head.

“I Grew Out of it.”

It is very common for a man who has “lost his Faith” or apostatised in young manhood, to claim that he “grew out of all that nonsense” when he came to understand the world as it is: and to add that no one who thinks for himself can possibly “swallow” the baby-stuff which the priests “put across.” The Bible, he points out, is filled with legendary tales which “science” has discredited; the idea of the Fall and Redemption is not only intellectually absurd, but morally repulsive: immortality is “wishful thinking,” and miracles just don’t happen.

With good reason, experienced priests distrust those who claim that they have seen through” the beliefs of their child-hood, and abandoned them on “rational” or “scientific” grounds. They are almost always able to show that revolt against the Christian moral law, or the Commandments of the Church, has played a large part in the process which has resulted in the repudiation of Faith.

Some habit of sin is formed and grows strong: the thing is concealed in confession and festers, until its corruption spreads from the heart to the mind. Or perhaps the struggle centres round loyalty to the Church’s laws regarding sexual relationships: there is a “marriage outside,” or an illicit liaison with the accompanying “will to freedom” — and the abrupt breaking of “ecclesiastical shackles” follows. A mixed marriage, with its gradual numbing effect on a Faith unshared by the partner, which is a cause of misunderstanding and inconvenience, may lead, ultimately, to a complete falling

away from religious belief as well as religious practice. Finally, there is the yielding, among Catholics, to the temptation of contraception.

The same change may take place, of course, simply through the slow corruption of Christian thought and manners by the infection of a non-Catholic and anti-Catholic atmosphere. The Church is disobeyed — then abandoned as making “impossible demands”; finally an attitude of hostility is adopted, and grounds for disbelief are readily grasped, by way of self-justification.

The Garbage Heap.

In all the cases listed here, the immediate cause of apostasy has been a collapse in face of moral temptation. That, however, is not the whole of the story. The inadequate, “childish” grasp of Catholic truth of those concerned often has very much indeed to do with these tragedies. The Faith has been held as a strange, arbitrary collection of beliefs and regulations unrelated to any vital experience of “reality.” The practice of religion has been habitual — a duty fulfilled with no strong sense of personal conviction. The “loyalty” is often to the tradition of a particular human group, rather than to the Divine Person of Our Lord, as revealed through His Church. From time to time, perhaps, “difficulties” have cropped up. Some objection raised casually in conversation, some argument seen in a book, have lodged themselves and remained at the back of the mind. No further inquiry has been made, through lack of any strong interest — resulting from the stunted condition of the religious intelligence generally. So the thing remains, like germ-laden garbage dumped in a corner.

In due course, the hour comes when there is some cherished sin upon which the soul is set — to which it clings, in defiance of the Church’s law. In that hour, the remnant of “garbage” ignored hitherto suddenly becomes of interest and importance: for by picking it over, the rebel may find some pretext which he can use to make his treason appear more respectable to himself and the world. What has taken place can now be explained away without reference to his moral weaknesses or worldly interests. He has found that his “inquiring mind” cannot remain within the narrow limits of the Faith. He has realised that its dogmas are irreconcilable with Science, or Modern Thought, or even with a really noble perception of Spiritual Truth. Indeed, once it is assaulted in a spirit of hostile criticism, the childish structure of his personal religious belief is such that he can find cracks and holes in every part of it, upon which to use the destroying hammer. It is not long before it lies in ruins, and he can build a new “design for living” to meet his own “needs” — that is, his personal desires and convenience.

The Man Who Knows.

Let us consider, now, the case of the truly “adult” Catholic, whose understanding of the Faith has grown with his growth, so that it has remained the centre of his “real world.” This lively personal Faith may not keep him from grave sins of pride, or passion or greed: he may drift, even, into a state of outlawry through his refusal to obey the Church’s laws, or to sacrifice his self-will — or through sheer sloth and inertia. But the final, ruinous step of apostasy is one which he will find it less easy to take — or to justify to himself by false reasonings.

He knows something of the strength and coherence of the mighty system of Catholic Truth; he is aware of how wonderfully its solutions answer the mysterious paradoxes of our human nature and destiny — how completely its discipline, imposed by Love, satisfies the need of each individual, helping him towards his special type of fulfilment. He can’t be fooled by parrot-phrases about an “Anthropomorphic” God made in man’s image, or worried by the thunders of the half-baked about

the “cruelty” or “monstrous self-assertion” of the Christian’s Divine Father. His developed Faith is untouched by the mockery and criticism which riddles mere “nursery” notions about the soul, the way of Redemption and the life of the world to come. He is able to see how enormously strong is the evidence for the Divinity of the Saviour, who rose from the dead — and therefore for the truth of His message. He perceives Church “dogmas” not in isolation, as credible or incredible, inspiring or repugnant, but in relation to the whole system of revealed Reality, in which they are embraced: and he knows how impregnable is this system, with its mystery and miracle, to scientific as well as philosophic and moral attacks.

There are times when such a man may feel his faith to be an intolerable burden and affliction — when his whole soul is shaken by the temptation to revolt against the Divine Reality because of some passionate desire, or to escape from the obligations which its acknowledgment imposes. He may, indeed, sin and blaspheme against the known Truth — “living in sin” until, perhaps, the Light of God fades out of his mind as well as his soul. But at least, his treasure of Faith is not at the mercy of the first serious assault of malice and perverse folly, because of an infantile weakness of understanding. And the odds are overwhelmingly strong that a man who has taken the pains to acquire adult wisdom in the things of God will not be finally lost — that the “Hound of Heaven” will overhaul the quarry when he is worn out with running.

Showing Forth the Faith.

So much, then, for this first point — that to be secure, one’s Faith should be personally grasped and developed by a personal effort in self-education, so as to counteract the effect of a world-atmosphere which tends to drug and destroy the sense of spiritual realities. It must not get “left behind” in one’s growth, until it becomes a relic of childhood, a traditional heirloom, disconnected with the rest of a life dominated by secular interests and ideals. Otherwise, it is quite likely that a time may come when the particular piece of “old furniture” appears ill-matched, inconvenient and rather silly, and is cast out of doors on some easy pretext.

But looking after his personal Faith properly, as a growing central thing in his life, is only the beginning of the Catholic layman’s duty in the world of our time. He has also the obligation of the Apostolate — which falls, to some degree, upon all Christian men and women. “Each one,” says St. Thomas Aquinas, “is bound to show forth his Faith, either to instruct and encourage others of the faithful, or to repel the attacks of unbelievers.” Pope Leo XIII, quoting this passage, adds that “to recoil before an enemy, or to keep silence when, from all sides, such clamours are raised against truth, is the part of a man who is either devoid of character, or who entertains doubts as to the truth of which he professes to believe. In both cases, such a fashion of behaving is base and insulting to God, and both are incompatible with the salvation of mankind. This kind of conduct is profitable only to the enemies of the Faith, for nothing emboldens the wicked so greatly as the lack of courage on the part of the good.”

Argument Is Useful.

Our “lack of courage” in this respect is in shameful contrast with the aggressive boldness of Communist zealots. These men raise their “sign of contradiction” for battle on all possible occasions: they push their beliefs down everyone’s throats, grasping every pretext which can be made to serve a propagandist purpose. It is ridiculous to pretend that this tactic has not been successful. Many, no doubt, have been irritated or amused — some moved to strong anger: but there has been a steady, swelling stream of converts to Communism, while others have been infected with

Communist sympathies, or with ways of thought about public affairs which are useful to the revolutionaries. The seed is sown broadcast, and a lot of it strikes root in the friendly soil of our de-Christianised community.

Yet, in face of the success of the enemy, we Catholic lay folk persist in shirking the use of a method obviously valuable — taking refuge in the dictum that “no one is ever converted by argument.” That word-battles can be mere sound and fury, achieving nothing, is sufficiently obvious — but it is no less certain that people’s minds can be and are affected by hearing a sincere and competent exposition of some disputed point of Faith; or by a general defence of Christianity by a man of intelligence and good humour; or, again, by a clear explanation of the Catholic viewpoint on the vital human problems of present-day social life. It isn’t only a question of converting people outright, but of “changing the atmosphere” by breaking down prejudices and dispelling illusions about what the Church teaches and stands for. Even if your hearer is not drawn to accept the full Faith, he may revise his creed and code so as to bring it somewhat nearer to the Truth—so that the Light and Love of God may be increased in him by your means.

This is a very great gain, for the great difficulty, in all Catholic apostolic work among non-Catholics, is to get rid of a fear and ill-will due to idiotic “bogey-ideas” about our religion which are based on a misunderstanding of what it really teaches, and “bogey-stories” about our history, which are based on the “black legend” of an unscrupulous hostile propaganda, handed on down nearly four centuries.

An “Escape-Clause” for Quitters.

The popular slogan about the ineffectiveness of argument is, in fact, an “escape-clause” for those unwilling to undertake the lay apostolate for other, very human reasons. They are shy and lacking in self-confidence — or is it “God-confidence”? They are afraid that if they “trail their coat” as Catholics they will become socially unpopular, or suffer in their business or professional life. Finally, they are fearful — with some reason — of doing no good, but incurring contempt and ridicule for themselves and their Religion, because their knowledge of the Faith is inadequate and ill-digested, and they cannot answer even quite commonplace criticisms against it. In this last fear, indeed, they may be very wise, since the mentally ill-armed believer may not only fail to win his fight, but may receive dangerous thrusts himself, if he tackles a clever opponent rashly.

There are cases when “sheltering” one’s Faith by a strategic retreat is a wise policy for most of us: and there are occasions, too, when apostolic speech is merely a “casting of pearls before swine,” since we are up against bitter ill-will, or impenetrable dullness or mere frivolity. But we have no business to keep our personal Religion in such a state that it cannot appear in everyday discussion with men on our own level of general culture. It is high time that we began making ourselves competent for our apostolic vocation, by working upon the sort of religious topics which are liable, at any moment, to be thrown up in conversation with our fellow-men — at work, or in the train, the club or the pub, or in social parties at home.

God — and Childish Images.

To begin with — how do I think about God? “I believe in God, Creator of Heaven and Earth...” Excellent—but can I give rational grounds for my Theism, If it is challenged by another fellow who has just proclaimed himself an Atheist — or dare I challenge him to justify his false opinion? Have I got a grasp of the argument from Motion, or from the Chain of Causes, or from the Design of the Universe, so that I can set them forth simply and understandably to another plain man? If not —

wouldn't it be a good idea to start on a simple course of apologetics, with the help of a few Catholic Truth Society pamphlets or books? What about getting a word of advice from my parish priest on the subject?

And the chances are that, while I'm "fishing" for information about this, I shall find out a lot of other things which will help to broaden and deepen my own conception of God. I shall find out that I have been thinking, in the past, in terms of childish images, and that a lot of my own and other people's difficulties are due to misunderstandings due to this sort of thinking.

I had the picture of a giant Being, with a sort of human intelligence and will. He had created the universe like a man makes a clock, and then "wound it up," and was now watching it-and me. He had made a lot of rules which I'd got to observe or else! But, on the other hand, He'd be very good to me if I behaved properly, and treated Him with due respect to His "Heavenly Majesty." Then, as I grew up, I found out how enormous the Universe was, and I began to wonder why its Maker should worry particularly about a world like a grain of sand in His sight so as to "give His only Begotten Son," and be interested in the baptism of children, or whether people went to Mass on Sundays, and kept the proper code in dealing with their girl-friends...He seemed a little sort of God for such a big Universe.

And then, it wasn't easy to "love" Him at times — as I understood love. His anger seemed arbitrary, and His punishments were pretty awful: Hell-fire and tortures and living with Devils — and all, perhaps, for something which most people wouldn't think serious at all. Still, I'd got to "love" Him, hadn't I... or else! And, of course, Our Lord Jesus Christ made it all a good deal easier in practice.

The Real God of Catholicism.

But, once I look into things, I find that I've been the victim of misunderstandings due to childish ignorance. First of all, the "personal" God of St. Thomas and St. Augustine is not a soft of Giant Superman — though we all tend to imagine Him in that way, because the only "persona" we know are human. It doesn't make things any easier to say He's an Impersonal Mind. It sounds lovely and mysterious and intelligent, to be sure — but the minds that we know are just persons thinking. In the world we know, you can no more have a mind without a personal thinker than a Cheshire cat's grin without the Cheshire cat. The "impersonal" beings we know — vegetables and stones and animals — are sub-human, not superhuman. It is clear, then, that God, far from being "impersonal," must be a lot more "personal" than we are ourselves. That's commonsense, anyway, since all the personal beings that exist came from Him — and "no one gives what He hasn't got." But it has nothing whatever to do with looking upon God as being "like a man" in any belittling sense.

Again, the bogey about the size of the universe fades away when I find that material "Size" has simply "nothing to do with the case"—that "big" and "little" don't mean anything when you're talking about the Spiritual order. God is "Immense" in His Power and Reality, but not in any sense that is related to our physical idea of the gigantic. And when we talk of His "paying attention" to the world, once again we are thinking in terms of human limitation, which simply don't apply. God hasn't any one particular "centre of interest" in the created world. He is completely and entirely present everywhere in the atom and the "flower in the crannied wall" as well as in the inconceivable vastness of the starry universe. His Love acts upon the world, and me, and each human being in every age, as completely as though no other object for His care existed. How He has dealt with other worlds of life — if there are such worlds — we don't know. But this much we do know: that if

His Word were incarnate a hundred thousand times elsewhere, the unique perfection of the Divine Gift to our own planet and the race of man would not thereby be diminished.

Then, as to His “rules,” and His “Anger” and punishment — I begin to see that I am not up against a sort of arbitrary code of celestial bye-laws. A certain pattern of conduct is required of my created Nature, if I’m to get the best out of it and “fulfil my destiny”: and, if I violate that pattern grossly and persistently, I shall suffer the natural consequences — just as I should, on a lower level, through the disregard of physical laws of health and life. God has left me free to choose whether I will observe the pattern in both spheres — because the highest purpose of His creative work was to make beings who might give themselves voluntarily to His love, and so attain their perfection. It is this mystery of Freedom — which every thinking human being must prize — which necessarily involves the possibility of final disaster through its misuse: that is, of Hell.

What is Hell?

“The Anger of God” is the apparent effect of sin as seen from my side: in that sense, it is real enough. But it is I who have reddened and darkened the Sun of Love which “enlightens every man,” by placing a veil between It and myself. I can fix myself in that situation, if I choose, by rejecting Him finally, and refusing to obey the law of Life. I shall lose His Love then — not because it has ceased to flow out towards me, but because I have set a barrier against it which His gift of freedom renders impassable, except by my will. And my own revolt, making obedient Nature itself my enemy, engenders the dark infernal fire to add to my self-inflicted torment. Thus, my will can achieve my ruin, despite God’s continuing love in offering me reconciliation, rendering me a fit companion only for the rebel spirits who hate Him, themselves, and one another.

Thus, I find an answer to my problems about Faith in God, not by rejecting the simple beliefs of my childhood as folly and fairy-tales, but by sloughing off my childish images and ways of thought, and deepening my understanding of those beliefs. The deep mysteries remain — but the discomforting sense that the whole thing is too small, and artificial and arbitrary, has disappeared. I have enlarged my grasp to the measure of my grown mind — and I begin to find the truths of Faith “real” and solemn and wonderful again, as they were in my childhood.

Soon I reach the stage when these studies become not merely an affair of duty, but a fascinating quest. My eagerness grows, as one problem after another crops up — presented by others or thrusting up from my own awakened mind.

Fall — Redemption — Resurrection.

I begin to see that the story of Eden isn’t infantile — as it once appeared — but enormously tragic: and enlightening, too, as regards the living world of men, where you can see everywhere the effects of that ancient revolt, in the “Law of Death” and frustration which overshadows the destiny of our race. I find that the Mystery of the Redemption can be presented so that it no longer looks like a queer device of God’s for correcting His own miscalculation about man by a sort of “legal fiction.”

The Resurrection of the Body is no longer a fantastic “extra” added to immortality, but a restoration inevitable to the completion of God’s plan for men, who are live body-souls, not angelic spirits dwelling in physical machines.

Science — and the Light of the World.

I learn more of the true relation of Faith to Science, so that I am no longer tormented by the phantom-fear of their being “irreconcilable.” I find that very many of the “difficulties” of Scripture are very old difficulties indeed, and were the subject of attention by wise Christian thinkers ages before they were “discovered” by secularist and modernist critics. The Old Testament “crudities” appear very differently, once I have grasped the idea of God’s gradual self-revelation to a childish, barbaric race which had to be moulded and prepared, step by step, so as to fulfil its part in the Divine scheme of Redemption.

I come to realise, too, that belief in one Faith and one Revelation through Christ does not forbid me to recognise the Divine “Light that enlightens every man” — the Light which appears, dimly and imperfectly, in the pagan’s service of his gods, in the Confucian’s veneration of the “Law of Heaven”, in the Moslem’s worship of Allah [the Arabic word for ‘the One God’]: and more strongly and powerfully in the faith and love of true-hearted Christian dissidents. I see how all that is true and good and lovely in these defective systems is embraced in the Catholic Church “outside which there is no salvation” — the Church in whose hidden life of grace the “Baptism of Desire” may enable many true lovers of God to share, even though they may never learn, on earth, the Name of their Divine Saviour.

And, meanwhile, I am learning of the mighty work of my Faith in the making of our Western civilisation, and of the wisdom she still has to offer to the rebel modern world. I see how her “social teachings” and their practical applications grow out of the deep truths which God has revealed about human nature and its needs: and I realise, ever more clearly, the idiocy of the “secularism” which tries to build the city of man without regard to the supreme Rock of Reality, God, “in Whom we live and move.”

The Lost Vision Returns.

By this building of our Catholic culture, and by training ourselves for the lay apostolate, we shall not only grow in Christian wisdom — but also in Divine grace. We shall find that our love of God grows with our knowledge — and our humility, too, as we perceive the wondrous depth of the well of His mysteries, to which we bring our tiny vessels for the Water of Life. Like Augustine, we shall cry, “too late have I loved Thee, O Thou Ancient Beauty”.

And as we kneel, amid a creation filled with strange splendour, alive with the glory of Angels — we shall find that something of the lost vision of childhood has returned to us, as to the Magi who worshipped at Bethlehem.

“Shepherds and sages

Met at the tryst:

Wisdom and innocence.

Meet in Christ.”
