Library Signpost

Christ and Our Money

By Rev. Benedict Ehmsman

One of Mr. Cronin's indiscretions in his **The Keys of the Kingdom** is to have Father Chisholm say that Confucius had a greater sense of humor than Christ — a pointless comparison, surely, for the verdict of history has conceded that Christ is the most eminently human being on its record without feeling it necessary to inquire whether a rollicking, or droll or dry, or mellow sense of humor is a necessary ingredient of that high eminence.

But that is not to say that there is not a certain humor in the Gospels, especially that high kind of humor known as irony. In the Savior's encounters with the Pharisees you come across it again and again, if you read with careful eye. Some of the parables derive their full meaning from their ironic conclusion, or from their ironic choice of characters. Such is the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican: there is rich humor in the deft touches which the Lord gives to the description of the Pharisee up there in the front of the Temple, parading his virtues before God. You have it in the parable of the Good Samaritan—the Jewish priest and the Levite passing by the stricken man on the roadside, but the Samaritan, an outcast, a pariah, stopping to administer mercy.

Yes Christ's humor is the humor of a God. "He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone": you can almost hear the laughter of the high Archangels in that deadly silence. "Before Abraham was made I am" while the Jews pick up stones to throw the morning stars sing together their jubilant joy in that upside-down paradox.

Many people find it difficult to get the point of the parable of the Unjust Steward, which is read on the eighth Sunday after Pentecost. Here again, the meaning hinges around a point of irony. It is as if the Lord had said: "Here you have a man of business, a shyster knowing how to provide for his rainy day. Why can't you children of the light learn to provide for that day when you shall be stewards no longer and shall be called upon to render your account with God. Yes "the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light."

Every year Christ throws out that challenging verdict to the children of light. Some listen with humble reverence. But a good many let it go in one ear and out the other, nonchalant, yawning, looking into blankness, going through the motions, in a coma of inattention, like a man hearing a message of life and death and asking what's your golf score.

Let's state the parable with characters of today.

(1) A professor in a college testified that he gave over $40 a month to communism, more than 10% of his income, and one time he even borrowed money from the bank to make up monthly dues he had missed.

(2) A Communist in Albany paid his monthly dues regularly, giving the usual 10% of his income. But he felt he wasn't sacrificing enough to spread revolution over the world. So giving up his home, for which he paid $40 a month rent, he moved into a little shack that rented for $25. Why? To give $30 more a month to the cause of communistic revolution.

(3) A wealthy young couple in New York City, quite sincere, were unfortunately caught by the half-truths of communism and were wise to its progress of world conquest. They, too, gave to the Red Party over 10% of their income each month. Then they went even further. They gave up their apartment on Park Avenue and took a couple of rooms on Second Avenue. Just how much this shift meant for the advance of communism was not revealed. But a fair estimate of the differences in their quarters would be at least $100 each month—and all for communism!

"The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light."

Christ says to us: "Are you doing as much? If not, why not?"

Taking it simply, this parable we heard last Sunday is a divine "tip" on how to invest our money, the mammon of iniquity, wisely. We have an enormous future to provide for. This future goes on eternity beyond our old age securities and pensions. God has given money a power to pay dividends in eternity. This is wonderful news. But we must accept God's terms, and particularly we must accept His bankers. They are a strange lot, these bankers: they are the poor, the ragged, the homeless, the "bums," the starving, the refugees, the diseased. They are the people who dwell on the Wall Street of God—their backs against the wall, indeed! Only the angels are the recorders day by day of God's Wall Street "quotations."

Here are a few tips for your investment which I found in Maryknoll's Mission magazine:

Happiness! But Where? Only in heaven for millions in South China today. But they've never heard of heaven. Send a catechist to show the way. $15 a month, $180 a year will do it. Bishop Paschang of Kongmoon has 100 catechists who must be paid regularly.

Flesh Is Not Life except in the Body of Christ. You can help supply this Life to the Bolivian mission. $30 will take care of the hosts and altar wine for a year.

Practical Charity is to be the test of the Last Judgment. "As long as you did it for one of these, you did it for Me." $5 keeps a refugee's rice bowl filled for a month. How many can you fill?

Living Faith is needed when the sick crowd into the dispensaries where the missioner has only empty shelves. $5 for serum and quinine for the dwellin dispensary would save lives—and perhaps souls!

But the list is almost an infinitum, showing God's goodness in making our banking easy—tens of thousands of branch offices all over, wherever's God's poor and needy are to be found.

It is up to us to match Christ's sense of humor with a little of our own, making light of that creature money which most men take so seriously.

(Note: Although the Maryknoll Want Ads are used in this article by way of illustration, yet they may awaken your interest to help them specifically. If so, address all gifts to The Maryknoll Fathers, Maryknoll P. O., New York.)

Getting On In The World

DRUNK OR SOBER?

In spite of the distress and misery which the alcoholics cause they are not unregenerate scoundrels at heart, according to Dr. Francis J. Braceland. For the most part, when sober, they are capable and attractive people. They are actually "not pernicious"; they are sick, just as sick as if they had typhoid fever.

In some cases abnormal drinking is covering a mental disease and the rhythm of periodic or "spree" drinking inclines us to compare it to the cycles of manic-depressive psychosis. In these conditions alcoholism in itself is not the important factor and the remedy naturally is directed at the underlying condition or cause.

That condition is most frequently psychological. It is helped but not remedied by the all too frequent tendency of the immediate family circle to hush it up, say that the victim is out of town, or something, and worst of all to keep his condition secret from both medical and spiritual advisers. The right must be hid, even at the expense of the drink addict.

Ninety-nine times out of a hundred if you're one of these unfortunates, you want to be cured, but have to do anything positive about it. You can go under the malicious impression that you just won't do it again. You refuse to face the soul-wrenching conclusion that life for you MUST be an alcohol free existence.

Taking the pledge will help—but only if you make up your mind to some tough fighting to keep that pledge and conquer the initial steps that lead to whoopee. Get it into your head that it is the FIRST drink, not the last, [illegible] havoc. Stay away [illegible] boyhoods, the tap [illegible] sist on soft drinks a[illegible] —after the first shock [illegible] will catch on and wo[illegible] with wise cracks.

They'll admire beneath their customary bandinage and, more importantly, you'll get a new lease on life, new confidence, and eventually become a new and better man.

'Quiz' Corner

Is there ever a conflict between the non-Catholic party concerning the bringing up of the children of a mixed marriage?

A. Before a dispensation for a mixed marriage is granted, the non-Catholic party must promise that all the children of such mixed marriage shall be baptized and raised in the Catholic faith and promises that this shall be done even in the event of the death of the Catholic party.

If a person has never been in a Protestant church service is it wrong for him to go to one out of curiosity?

Curiosity should not enter religion. To go in a Protestant church means to take part in a Protestant service. To take formal part in a Protestant service is wrong. We can not see that there would be any reason for a Catholic to go to a Protestant church unless it would be to attend at a funeral of a friend and then it would be distinctly understood that it was nothing more than an act of friendship.

Did not the Lord say, "Revenge is mine"?

Correct. But vindication of one's own rights is not necessarily prompted by revenge. There is a difference between trying to safeguard one's own rights and trying to hurt one's neighbor for the sake of hurting him and satisfying one's own hatred and anger. Thus St. Paul says, "Revenge not yourselves, but let [illegible] wrath, for it is written, Revenge is mine, saith the Lord, and I will repay."

Let your appeal be to [illegible] son. Passion is the [illegible]

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theirs. Mary was the child of prayer. Every Jewish maiden longed for the day when as a wife she might through fruitfulness be ready for a part in the promised day of the Messiah; might perhaps be the Mother of the Promised Redeemer. Barrenness was a trial, a disappointment, an exclusion from the ranks of prospective chosen women.

That one found worthy by God to be the mother of the Blessed Virgin, should be by men pronounced worthy of their love and devotion, is most natural. "Good St. Anne," her clients address her!

May her prayers be with us all in these dark days! May her motherly heart minister consolation to the thousands of mothers torn with worry over the boys they have so gladly given to the service of their country! May her prayers united to those of her daughter, the Queen of Peace, serve to hasten the day of victory with peace, of peace with victory, for the arms of our country! For our mothers and homes, our sons and daughters, our soldiers and sailors, we make our petition: Good St. Anne—Pray for us!

FREEDOM OF WORSHIP—FREEDOM FROM WANT

Last week's issue of the COURIER carried the stirring message of our business men answering the query—"What are we fighting for," —and the answer in part is—"For Freedom of Worship." Such a message from men of this patriotic type to us and to our children should not be considered ephemeral, passing, to be read and discarded. No! It ought to be well filed on the pages of our memory, it ought to be clipped from the paper and preserved with its companion pieces for future reading. For future reading while the war continues, to keep alive our earnest understanding of the noble motives that prompt our fighting: for future reading after peace with victory crown our efforts. It will be a wonderful thing to review in that happy day that Freedom of Worship as guaranteed by America was one of the Four Freedoms which we fought to preserve for ourselves, which we fought to confer once more on those whom dictators had deprived of this priceless boon.

The current issue gives another and important addition to the answer to the query—"What are we fighting for?"—in a message on Freedom from Want! "The Heaven of Heavens is the Lord's: the earth He hath given to the sons of men." Proper attention to the production and distribution of the things of this earth among all men according to their needs, should produce a lasting Freedom from Want. The curse of the oppressor who has brought want to his own country, who has imposed on millions of the people of conquered nations such want as they have never before experienced, would bring to an end Freedom from Want in America. We are fighting that our children and the children of other nations may not be deprived of the bounteous goods in food and raiment and shelter, in opportunity and ambition and prospects, that a good God has prepared for them—that a wicked oppressor would take from them.

The COURIER rejoices to cooperate with these patriotic business men and industrialists in this patriotic presentation of a full answer to the question—"What are we fighting for?"

Sursum Corda

'Three Fragments'

By Rev. James M. Gillis, C.S.P.

The Three Fragments are bits of conversation. I will give them in order and then make a bit of comment upon them, though perhaps no comment will be necessary.

I present the first sample without the name of the speaker. Today is the day of the Quiz. See if you can guess who was the author of this beautiful sentiment.

"Germany needs Christianity more than ever. She needs churches. We must halt the movement of the godless. We need your support. We need the support of all who have the interests of the Fatherland at heart. I am a Catholic, but I ask for your help in my work. I assure you that it is my aim—and I consider it as part of my mission—to give back to the churches the position they held before the unfortunate revolution. The future State will do everything possible to strengthen the moral authority of religion. For the State we contemplate must be founded on the mysticism which only religion can give it."

Yes you have guessed it: the one who made that pious and statemanlike utterance is Adolf Hitler. You will find the passage in a book which consists largely of conversations between Hitler and Pastor Martin Niemoeller. The only thing I don't like about that book is its title "I Was in Hell with Niemoeller." Melodramatic title. And misleading, because it would make you think that the stuff inside the covers must be sensational and the treatment hysterical. It is quite the contrary. Leo Stein who does the reporting gives the assurance that he wrote down conscientiously just what Niemoeller had told him **sotto voce** while they walked under the surveillance of guards side by side, in the concentration camp.

Therefore in that first of the three fragments you have, I think with substantial accuracy the words of Hitler spoken to a group of ministers of the Evangelical Church. If anyone is puzzled as to how good Christian people, amongst them Catholics in Germany could have been neutral to Nazism or even favorable to it from 1932 to 1939 when Hitler's power was mounting, the riddle is to a degree solved by the fact that the Fuehrer and his lieutenants gave every assurance not only that the German people would be liberated but that in the process their religion would be safeguarded.

And now the second fragment, which you may call the denouement or if you prefer the disillusion.

"But soon," said Pastor Niemoeller, "we were shockingly awakened from our pleasant dreams. There was no cessation of the propaganda against the churches. On the contrary it was intensified. During the time that the Nazis were consolidating their political position they did not attack the churches directly. But when they felt that their position was secure they put forth a plant to unify all the churches in Germany, and to force them to adjust their doctrine to the Nazi ideology. Without waiting for our consent, or even consulting us, Hitler appointed an army chaplain, Ludwig Mueller, as Reichbishop. The Reichbishop had supreme control of all the Churches of Christ in Germany. The indignant protests of the Evangelical and Roman Catholic Churches were answered with the explanation that in the new Germany only one church could be allowed to exist. And if that church expected moral and financial assistance from the State, it would have conform to the policies of the State."

There you have it. The same old game played by diplomats from the beginning. Promise everything: promise the sun, moon and stars; promise liberty, freedom, equality, justice. Pour it on. But when you have the other man's or the other nation's name on the dotted line, you may do what you please. Tyrants, dictators and such have the advantage—if it can be so called—of not being inhibited by conscience. Witness Napoleon, who negotiated a Concordat, got it signed and then stuck in "The Organic Articles," the validity of which the Pope did not acknowledge. Hitler has taken a page out of the book of the other "little corporal" who rose to absolute power.

And now the third fragment.

"Are you aware, Reichschancellor," said Niemoeller to Hitler, "that what you call 'measures of protection for the Church' means that the Church will become nothing but an instrument of propaganda for the National Socialist movement? How can you expect us to do that? Do you really think that we are so contemptible that we could surrender the sacred faith given to us by God and accept any kind of political ideology in its place?"

"It will be necessary to adjust the Christian dogma to the ideas which we National Socialists represent," Hitler replied, and then he said, "The National Socialist ideology is more than a mere political program. It is a **Weltanschauung** (world view), comprising everything of importance for mankind, including religion. An adjustment of the Christian dogma to the demands of our times will not weaken the position of the Church, but strengthen it, and will secure its unconditional backing by the great power of the National Socialist State."

No comment is necessary. But if one line be permissible, Shakespeare wrote it: "Put not your trust in princes." Yes, princes, Duces, Fuehrers, political parties. They will play you false if they can. They will bluff you, use you, and chuck you the moment you cease to play their game for them. We are learning a lot from this war. A lot that we should have learned before. And one of the principal items that we are learning over again is that when Church and State come to an agreement, the Church had better keep its eyes wide open.

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"Whereas, cooperatives patterned on sound Rochdale principles are so completely in harmony with Catholic dogma and Catholic philosophy of life . . . Resolved, that the members of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference continue the promotion and extension of cooperatives . . ."—National Catholic Rural Life Conference (1939).