

You Can Tell a Christian By His 'Spirit'

THEOLOGY OF THE WORLD

(Twenty-fifth in Series)

By BISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN

Whenever the Church is tested in history, and a Babel of voices contradict and make counter-claims, it becomes difficult for the ordinary faithful to discover the spirits: to know whom to follow and whom to reject.

Who has the Spirit of Christ and who has the spirit of the world? The point of this article is to ask the faithful to make the distinction. It is not easy, because both spirits are in the Church, as both spirits were among the followers of Our Lord.

Take the two brothers, James and John. Examining their "consciences," these two "Sons of Thunder" were absolutely certain that the Samaritans were guilty of narrowness, pettiness and intolerance. They swanted action: "Burn them" (Luke 9/54). The Sons of Thunder would become the Sons of Lightning. Our Lord turned and rebuked them: "You do not know what manner of spirit you are." There was pride, passion and personal revenge covered under the picture of zeal for justice. Our Lord, instead of following their counsel, pushed His way through the town of the Samaritans and "went to another village."

These two brothers still did not learn the difference between the Spirit of Christ and the spirit of the world. Both were ambitious, and particularly so having heard Our Blessed Lord calling Peter "Satan." Did this mean that the leadership of the Church was now up for grabs? Whether it was the mother who presented the request, or whether it was the sons alone, makes little difference. They wanted authority, not service; so they begged the Lord: "Allow us to sit, one at the right hand and the other at your left in glory" (Mark 10/37). Honor they sought, not identification with the Suffering Servant. To this spirit of worldliness the Lord answered: "You do not know what you are asking."

The greatness in the kingdom was in an entirely different direction from where they were going. They were among the inner circle, the chosen three; they were better off than the other disciples because their father was an employer and had hired servants (Mark 1/20); so they probably felt as so many do in the Lord's service, that they were not appreciated, but they still had no concept of what glory really was.

Notice how Our Lord tested to see if they had His Spirit: "Can you drink the cup that I must drink, or be baptized with the baptism with which I am to be baptized?" The cup of which Our Lord speaks is the experience allotted to men by God. The word "baptism" meant being submerged in a difficult experience. He was asking if they could pass through a Garden of Gethsemane and a Calvary as He would do.

It was another restatement of the essence of the evangel, that there is no crown without a cross. Some never get beyond the soft Gospel, "considering the lilies of the field, how they grow" (Matt. 6/28); never do they carry through to the logical conclusion that the Christian faith is wrestling not with flesh and blood, but with the principalities and rulers of darkness (Eph. 6/12).

In the first experience the Sons of Thunder learned that violence to others is not the Christian spirit; in this moment they were taught the value of violence to self, or the crucifixion of the ego to give birth to the "new creature" of the Spirit.

The incident of the "Sons of Thunder" indicates that one can be with Christ physically, but not spiritually; one can be "in" the Church and "out" at the same time. What separates those who are nominally Christians from those who are really Christians are: love of violence on the one hand and love of comfort on the other. James and John wanted to "take over" and start a burning of the "establishment" of the Samaritans. Peter also wanted a soft-cushioned pew where he could comfortably confess Divinity, but eschew all mortification and self-denial. The two brothers wanted the cross all right, but it was to be laid on the shoulders of others.

Can the Worldly and the Spiritual Communicate?

The Spirit of Christ and the spirit of the world are like two men going in different directions. The more they advance, the farther apart they get. Only those of the same spirit or mentality can communicate with one another.

A gambler can talk readily to a gambler, but can a gambler understand how a Trappist gambles his life for the love of Christ? A porpoise can communicate with a porpoise, and perhaps a dog with a dog in a trivial kind of way, but certainly man can communicate with man. But can a sensible man communicate with one who has the Spirit of God? "After all, the depths of a man can only be known by his own spirit, not by any other man, and in the same way, the depths of God can only be known by the Spirit of God. Now instead of the spirit of the world, we have received the Spirit that comes from God to teach us to understand the gifts that He has given us.

"Therefore, we teach, not in the way in which philosophy is taught, but in the way that the Spirit teaches us; we teach spiritual things spiritually. An unspiritual person is one who does not accept anything of the Spirit of God; he sees it all as nonsense; it is beyond his understanding because it can only be judged by means of the Spirit" (I Cor. 2/10-15).

Pilate, Annas and Caiaphas and the people who crucified Christ, acted out of worldly wisdom. Pilate thought Our Lord was too human; Annas and Caiaphas thought He was too Divine. If they had known Who He was, they would have withheld their impious hands.

Those who crucify His Body, the Church, do it for the same two worldly reasons: In their frail human wisdom, some condemn the Church for not being more worldly, more secular, more tolerant of Sodom. Others do not thus find it too Divine, but going to the other end of the spectrum, they denounce the Church for meddling in politics, interfering in war-mongering and for being too much interested in civil rights.

Only the Spiritual

Understand the Spiritual

The natural man receives not the things of God, for they are foolishness to him. Neither can he know them, for they are as St. Paul says "spiritually discerned." Talk to a sensual man about celibacy, to a young woman who has surrendered her virtue, to an alcoholic about temperance, to a thief about honesty, and it will be discovered that the "darkness does not comprehend the light" (John 1/5). Nor does this Spirit of Christ come from study alone. If it did, every D.D. would be a saint. Knowledge often puffs up and gives us a greater power of rationalization when we do wrong. Sometimes education makes clever devils out of stupid devils.

But if knowledge alone does not create the Spirit of Wisdom in man, what does? Obeying the commandments and doing the Will of God: "If anyone is prepared to do the Father's Will, he will know whether My teaching is from God or whether My doctrine is My own" (John 7/17). Obedience to the Will of God is one of the conditions of discovering more truth.

In catechetics we too often fall into the error of believing that if we know the Christian doctrine, we will be good; it is the other way around, if we obey and are good, then we will have a deeper understanding of Christian doctrine. Love is the state of mind to which God makes known the things which He has prepared. God is love, and love alone can make itself known. God cannot reveal Himself to any other temperament.

Gardens have plants that should be in full bloom, but they may still be unopened after the time for them to send forth their fragrant blossoms. Why are they still enclosed in their natural shields? Because of the condition of the air—it was cold and frosty, and the buds could only reveal themselves in genial sunshine. Were they to open to frosty air, they would endanger their lives. The cold, critical spirit is fatal to the revelation of love. It freezes the channels of the heart and makes it impossible, even for the love of God, to find its way in.

There is a Spirit-Gap

Those who have lost the Spirit of Christ seek out companions who have also lost it. The Spirit-gap is far wider than the Generation-gap. If we have great difficulty in communicating what pain is despite our sympathy for the sufferer, how much more so the great mysteries of God! Only the grafted branch gets the sap; only the united member partakes of Life's blood. They who possess only the spirit of the world may have more knowledge than others, but their capacity is like that of the sundial which reflects the time indeed, but only when the light shines upon it. Without some kind of sympathy for the mind of a poet, it is impossible to appreciate poetry. Each distinct species of poetry is understood as the reader finds himself some taste for it. The musician may freely give to others the treasures that have enriched his soul, and yet through a distaste for music, one may not receive a single emotion. Those who attend a symphonic concert take from it what they have brought into the concert. So the Divine Harmonist may freely give the harmony of heaven, but these joys are received only by those who know them. "He who is born of the flesh is flesh, and he who is born of the Spirit is Spirit" (John 3/6).

Anyone who has dealt with those who have fallen from the Spirit has experienced that Great Divide, or the Grand Canyon between the world and the Spirit. If one mentions scandal or sin to them, or refers to those unnatural abuses which St. Paul so closely links up with atheism, one is met with the retort: "But you do not understand!" How true it is!

Fritz Kreisler once told me that in an orchestra of fifty he could detect one false note. But there must have been some in his audience that would not know if most of the notes were wrong. To some, music is a bore; to others, it is an inspiration. The man who cannot read his own mother's letter without an eyeglass often insists on interpreting the secrets of the Infinite God by his own poor, unaided reason. Darwin has told of two blind men with whom he was in the habit of conversing for years. They told him that: "...they never-remembered having dreamed of visible objects after they became totally blind". It would seem that when men give themselves up to lower and meaner things, or when they fall away from a noble vocation, the higher and nobler faculties of the soul come to trouble them less and less. Eventually the spiritual and the unseen seem to them as though they were not.

Three Tests to Search for the Spirit

Three tests offered by Scripture to judge between those who have the Spirit of Christ and those who have the spirit of the world are the following:

1. The first test is conformity of teaching with the Gospel and the teaching of the Church. "There are obviously men who are upsetting your faith with a travesty of the Gospel of Christ. Yet, I say that if I, or an angel from Heaven, were to preach to you—any other gospel than the one you have heard, may he be damned! If I were trying to win human approval I should never be Christ's servant" (Gal. 1/6-11).

Related to this is the teaching of the Magisterium of the Church on faith and morals. On a lower level than Revelation and Infallible de-

New York — (RNS) — There are still many "dark" areas facing Roman Catholic theologians despite nearly 20 centuries of theological development, an eminent German theologian said in an interview here.

Among such areas, Father Karl Rahner, S.J., noted, are questions related to the doctrine of papal infallibility, the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, transubstantiation and Original Sin.

Father Rahner repeatedly used the German word, "dunkel," to describe large areas of theological study. The dictionary defines the word as "dark, gloomy, obscure"; the translators reached a consensus that "unclarified" might convey approximately its theological bearing.

The ecumenical movement seems to have slowed down to a halt, he said, asking: "Is it a creative pause or a deadlock?" He noted that in Germany, ecumenical impetus seems "not sufficient on either side." Catholic or Protestant. Besides "theoretical difficulties," he said, "institutional inertia and self defense" may be involved. But he noted that the attitude of the younger generation of priests seems "entirely different" and said that there seems to be more



FATHER KARL RAHNER

ecumenical progress in the United States than in Germany.

"I will not say that the Catholics alone are to blame" for the slow pace of ecumenism, he said. He added that Rome sometimes seems more progressive on this issue than many bishops — or their chancery offices.

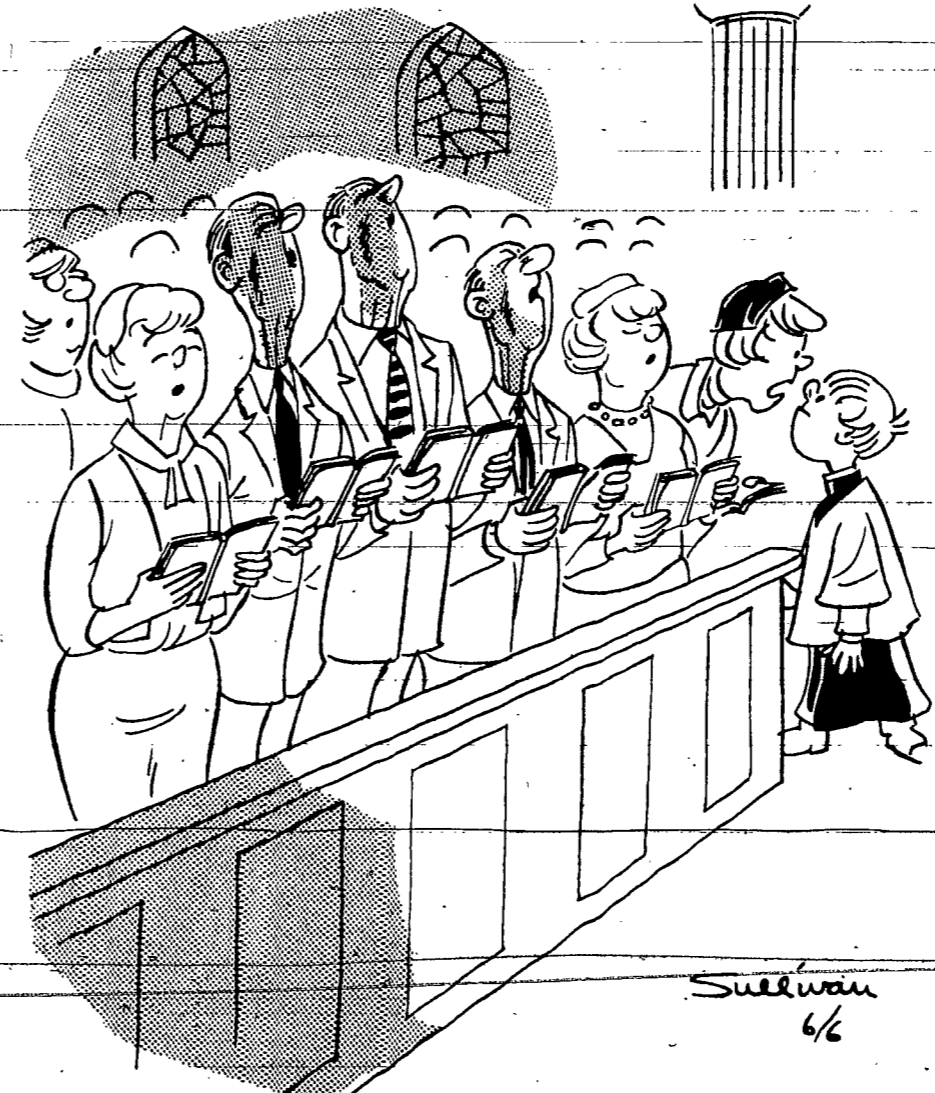
One of the "dunkel" areas mention-

ed by Father Rahner in the interview was the exact point at which a theologian, departing from traditional doctrinal formulas—begins teaching a doctrine which is not officially Catholic.

He cited extreme cases, indicating that the "dark" area lay somewhere between them. The many theologians who have expressed disagreement with Pope Paul's encyclical on birth control "cannot be considered heretical in their teaching simply because their question parts of a papal encyclical," he said.

On many questions, the German theologian observed the traditional, officially accepted formulation leaves broad areas open to further exploration. Thus, in discussing infallibility, one encounters open questions on such subjects as the exact definition of "truth." The definitions given by ecumenical councils, including Vatican I which defined infallibility, must be seen in the context of their time, Father Rahner said.

There are also many areas for development open in the expression of defined dogmas in modern terminology and in the investigation of their applicability to modern situations, he believes.



"FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE, TELL THE ORGANIST TO LOWER THE KEY!"

Journals Express Regret at Bishop Shannon Resignation

New York — (RNS) — Strong reaction to the resignation of Bishop James P. Shannon—especially to the offer that he accept a post in "exile"—has been voiced by several Roman Catholic publications.

They generally held that the Catholic Church in the U.S. should not be allowed to lose the services of this "honorable, intelligent and devoted churchman."

"Still a relatively young man," the Pittsburgh Catholic editorialized, "Bishop Shannon has a fine mind and a large heart; those who know him personally attest to his love of the Church and his unflinching commitment to her salvific mission.

"It would be a pity if he were to be denied the opportunity to serve the Church to the full extent of his talents," the editorial concludes.

In confirming that he had written to Pope Paul VI asking to resign because he could not accept the principles expressed in the encyclical on birth control, Bishop Shannon revealed that the Apostolic Delegate in the U.S., Archbishop Luigi Riboldi, suggested that he agree to move to another country and live there without any pastoral assignment.

The editorial in the national Catholic weekly, Ave-Maria, published by the Holy Cross Fathers, was signed by Father John Reedy, editor. Expanding on the "exile" suggestion, he noted: "The proposal was outrageous. It was profoundly scandalous. It was more poisonous to the spirit of the Church in this country than a platform full of bitter priests talking about the weaknesses of the ministry they have left."

The Catholic Messenger of Davenport, Iowa, in its editorial, suggested that Bishop Shannon be placed in charge of an "Independent Ordinariate for non-Catholic Colleges and Universities."

Word for Sunday

'Put Out Into the Deep'

By Father Albert Shamon

We may call next Sunday's Gospel "The Three F's." Failure: "we worked hard all night and caught nothing." Faith: "but at your word I will lower the net." Fortune: "they caught a great number of fish and their nets were at breaking point."

Because "failure" is so much a part of life, it will be well to ponder over the apostles' failure.

In the first instance, failure is never a disgrace provided we have done our best — "worked hard all night." They fail, and they alone, who have not tried. Often God doesn't let one see the success of his work. Christ did not. One sows, another reaps, but both will be blessed.

It is enough if we do our best. God looks at effort, not at results. In His own good time, He turns all honest, sincere effort into success.

The apostles were skilled men. They had worked hard. They were disheartened by the night's work, but they were not in despair, for they were washing and mending their nets to try another night. Success came, but it came in the most unlikely way. It came in daytime—the proper time for fishing was at night. It came by doing the very same things that had previously been done in vain. But success came because now Christ was with them and they were obedient to His word. Nor did success go to their heads, for that was one of the purposes of their previous failures.

Success, after failure, led the apostles not from Christ but more closely to Him: "they left everything and followed Him."

Again, failure could have come from the fact the apostles might have been fishing in the wrong spot. A boy

'Friendship Meals'

Backed by English Ecumenical Group

London — (NC) — The Ecumenical Commission for England and Wales has urged Catholics and other Christians to express their friendship for each other by sometimes taking part in an agape or "friendship meal."

The commission, which was set up by the English bishops, defines such a meal as an "ordinary meal shared by divided Christians or by a family group. It is informal and can take a variety of different forms by the introduction of Scripture readings, prayer, thanksgiving and blessing, breaking and sharing of bread."

But the commission emphasized that such an agape must under no circumstances be identified with the Eucharist or intercommunion.

It prescribed safeguards "to ensure that such a meal is not confused with Holy Communion or taken as a substitute for it.

Properly understood, it said, the agape is "of great value as a means of expressing a real friendship in Christ, transcending all Christian divisions and of deepening the desire and aspiration for the unity that can only be fully expressed in the sacrament of unity achieved."

Catholics can now attend the eucharistic celebrations of other Christians, it pointed out, and share in worship with them, though always without intercommunion.

Letters

Editor:

Since it is not possible for me to answer each letter personally, much as I would like to, I take this opportunity to express my gratitude and appreciation to good friends and contributors for letters and messages expressing their regret at the closing of St. Michael's Stamp Bureau.

For all who asked to whom they could send their stamps in future, I suggest our Franciscan Fathers, whose address is:

Shasi Mission Unit
St. Joseph's Seminary
Callicoon, N.Y. 12723

Sister Marie Rose, O.S.F.,
St. Elizabeth's Motherhouse,
Allegany.



with his hook and line fishes off a bridge: no fish. He sits on a log: no fish. He stands in the sunlight and casts his line: no fish. Finally he tries near a dam, hides himself from the fish, flings out his line: fish come as fast as he can catch them. Often we stay too close to shore. Naturally we prefer the good, safe, calm spots.

But to bring the world to Christ and Christ to the world, we must go where the action is, go where the fish are. The world will not come to the Church, the Church must go to the world — "put out into the deep."

Often God permits failure to try our faith. One cannot tell that the pine is ever green until winter comes. Or God tries us with a little to see what we would do with a lot. So often many give up one effort short-of success.

James J. Corbett, one time heavyweight champion of the world, used to say, "To be a champion, just fight one round more." Or to mix the metaphor, when Moriarty of the Detroit Tigers stole home, a sports writer wrote an article: "Don't die on third."

Life is queer with its twists and turns,

As every one of us sometimes learns,

And many a fellow turns about

When he might have won had he stuck it out.

Don't give up though the pace seems slow —

You may succeed with another blow.

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