

from the grown branches. Saints are not ready-made. Turn to God, our Lord tells us; turn to him for everything that is necessary for your spiritual life, for your natural life. You cannot ask too much. Recall M. Dupont's query to a petitioner who was making long phrases to God in her prayer. 'Do you want to be cured? Then say, "Cure me!"' God is your father, so be more child-like in your approach to him. If you don't ask, you won't receive. If what you ask is good for you, if it is right for you to have it, then God will give it when you ask him; you will get it. He is a loving father. But if I ask for things that seem best to me and I do not get them, then I have just to say, 'I am mistaken; God sees it is not good for me'. God sees and knows: trust him.

So it is not very long, I think, before anybody to whom God is a reality uses prayer of petition; we are told to. Even the highest contemplatives and mystics used it, though their form might be different from other people's.

True, my prayer will tend to become less and less self-regarding and more and more something for God. 'My delight is to be with the children of men.' God made us for himself. I am only truly fulfilling the object of my creation when I am trying to achieve, even in this life, some degree of that complete surrender to God of which the next life will consist.



## SEAT OF WISDOM<sup>1</sup>

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**T**HE Lord is my Light.' These words from the psalm form the device of our senior University. Come back with me a moment to the early years of the twelfth century. Come to Oxford, to the vicinity of St Mary the Virgin's Church in the High Street. A certain

<sup>1</sup> A sermon broadcast on October 25th, 1953. This sermon is as delivered from Newbold Revel for Education Sunday, but for a few words omitted in the broadcast to save time.

Theobald, a master from Normandy, arrives here with his own group of disciples. Later his place is taken by Robert Pullen and Vacarius of Bologna.

In the second half of the century, there comes a whole migration of masters and disciples, driven back from Paris because of discrimination against their countrymen. Oxford was then an island town, surrounded by marshland and rivers, at the spot where the Cherwell joins the Isis or Thames: an important river crossing with easy access to London. The food supply was good, and it was in the centre of England's population.

All these scholars were loyal sons of the Church, and naturally gathered round an Oxford church to form what would quickly become an educational centre of world importance. So rapid was its growth that we read in Gerald the Welshman's record that Oxford's clergy excelled over those of all England, that there were doctors in many faculties, and clerical and lay students of all ranks. There was even, in Catte Street, just under St Mary's, the inevitable bookshop, with its binders, illuminators, writers and parchments. We hear also, before the century was out, of University Sermons from St Mary's pulpit.

From that day to this, St Mary's has been at the heart of Oxford University; and, since the thirteenth century, its spire has been perhaps its most characteristic landmark. Whether or not the first arrivals adopted as their device 'The Lord is my Light', they would rejoice that their lot had thrown them near a church dedicated to the Mother of the Lord. Because she had brought forth the Incarnate Word or Wisdom, she had long been known as the Seat or Mother of Wisdom. She, they hoped, would continue to give Christ to the world as the Light of Wisdom.

As they proudly organised a school in their homeland, they may well have repeated the words of an English prayer, found in the archives of an English college of that age: 'May we, following the Lamb without stain, with gladness behold thee the Son with thy Mother in our native land!' They had in mind to do in their native land what their English and French forefathers had already done in Paris, among the vineyards on the left bank of the Seine, around

the hill and shrine of St Genevieve, where the University is still found.

Other such groups of varying size and importance had gathered in churches and monastic cloisters in many parts of the Catholic world. The Church was their natural patron, and for many years masters and pupils were mainly from among the clergy. The Church could not help encouraging them, since she had always believed—as indeed by her calling she *must* believe—that education is a sacred duty. Her Master, Jesus Christ, had said: ‘I am come a light into the world; that whosoever believeth in me, may not remain in darkness’. Evil loves darkness; and light, so far as it is light, comes from God; in fact, God is light. Through sin and ignorance the world has fallen into barbarity; it must be redeemed in Christ from both sin and ignorance. All that is good, they knew, belongs to Christ, and must be won back for him.

But surely it will not do to identify virtue with knowledge. Knowledge without grace will never save men from sin and hate. I agree; nor, on the other hand, can there be salvation without the light of knowledge.

You may be thinking: Is then salvation only for the well-educated? Obviously not; salvation is for all, and higher education for the more gifted. But adequate knowledge of truth among the many does depend upon the due cultivation of the talents of each. For mankind is a society; each benefits by all, and all by each; the more gifted hold their greater and deeper knowledge in trust for others; discussion and mutual intercourse give everyone some share in laying up society’s common treasure of wisdom. Some part in that common treasure is for each of you and for me, whatever our personal contribution. Only thus can we all begin to have a true understanding, love and reverence for God and our neighbour.

Church and school have at this point each an important responsibility. The institute of learning must see that talents are developed, and that the more gifted share their blessings with their less fortunate neighbours. The Church must see that, once knowledge is gained by individual or community, it is used for the glory of God and the good of mankind.

Ceaselessly must she proclaim: Knowledge is for men, not men for knowledge; and true knowledge should be fruitful knowledge. It is the education for life that matters; and it is this conviction which inspires the Christian scholar, not the learning by which we impress, or, still worse, deceive or harm.

The urgency of fruitful—as opposed to barren or harmful—knowledge, of bringing the light of truth for the life of men, was recognised by Oxford's first chancellor, Robert Grosseteste. Oxford was in fact this very last week celebrating the seventh centenary of his death. Robert, though one of the greatest lovers of learning in his day, was yet a greater lover of men and women. According to tradition, he once observed: 'Our Lord said: Feed my sheep; not teach my shepherds'. If one did not know him, one might have thought he was attacking universities and training colleges. Actually, he was warning us that the Christian should not seek learning with the sole object of supporting an academic existence among professors or in the pages of learned reviews. He must let his light shine before men, before ordinary men and women like you and me. For he is a follower of Christ, who was not merely the Light, but the Light of *men*.

How truly Christian has been the best spirit of our senior university is illustrated by two other Oxonians I love, St Thomas More in the fifteenth century and John Henry Newman in the nineteenth. In both there was a marriage of humanistic culture with deep Christian piety. Culture without religion will be superficial, if not harmful. Piety without culture remains crude and undeveloped.

Both of these leaders knew we could not reach the whole light without reaching Christ. Nor could we follow Christ without loving the truth. The truth and goodness in this world came from Christ, and we should bring them back to him for his consecration.

This ideal is perfectly expressed by Newman: 'Christ came for this very purpose, to gather together into one all the elements of good dispersed throughout the world, to make them his own, to illuminate them with himself, to reform and refashion them into himself. He came to make a *new* and better beginning of all things than Adam had been, and

to be a fountain-head from which all good henceforth might flow.'

Men like More and Newman did not fear learning. It was not a question of choosing between Christ and culture. Of course, Christ comes first: but Christ would be less honoured if we failed to adorn the nature he came to consecrate with whatever true culture we can bear. In the truth and light his help brings us, he will recognise his own choice gifts to men.

In St Thomas More, culture was joined to a rare English humour: a good humour, not a mocking frivolity as is sometimes found in the pedant or bookman. When surprise was expressed that he should find it worth his while to instruct his children so carefully at a time when their very personal safety was endangered, he replied that, if they must pass out of their course before their parents, he would rather they died well-instructed than ignorant. He used to tell these children they were to take learning and virtue for their meat with play merely as their sauce.

At their different times, More and Newman both lived almost in the shadow of St Mary the Virgin. Both knew how to unite learning with virtue, and true humanism with full Christian faith. Newman wrote the great classic on Humanism, more appreciated today than ever before, which he modestly called *The Idea of a University*. Culture he thought second only to God's word and grace the source of true human freedom. But, contrary to a common view, he exposed the fallacy that the best humanism could save man or the world without Christian charity. It was the fallacy of his day to think the veneer of the 'English gentleman' an adequate substitute for religion.

These two Oxford educationalists had their enemies. St Thomas More lost his life for refusing to sacrifice his conscience to the State; Newman struggled all his life to protect revealed truth against Agnosticism. Undue State interference on the one hand, and the exclusion of Christian faith on the other, are still in some countries a danger to the freedom and fullness of learning. A further danger, against which Newman and Grosseteste struggled, is utilitarianism, which would subordinate knowledge to selfish, merely pro-

fessional or material interests rather than to the perfecting of the individual and the good of the community.

The watchword, then, that Oxford has inherited from its medieval days is *Dominus illuminatio mea*, 'The Lord is my Light'. Was it this motto which was the inspiration of Newman's hymn, 'Lead, kindly Light'? Surely no better watchword has ever been chosen by a home of learning. It implies that culture, knowledge and wisdom come only from God. It also supposes the impossibility of a clash between true knowledge and God's Word. That Word, which in the flesh was our Lord Jesus Christ himself, is it not 'the Light that enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world'?

Most of you who are listening are probably teachers in some sphere or other; with many of you it is your profession. It is your vocation to bring God's light to men, and bring men to God's light. The Lord must be a light to all; and, where is light, there is the Lord. In your sphere you are mediators, just as we priests are mediators in the sphere of grace.

Your students will come to you undeveloped, still in the darkness of ignorance. First, you will show them their powers; you will bring these powers to light. You will warn them of their limitations. You will encourage, yet being careful to protect them from pride or vanity. You will make them understand that 'the Lord is their Light' who will not hide himself from those that seek him humbly. You will encourage them, showing them that their gifts come from God for a purpose. They are a power for good that they hold in trust for mankind. They must not think these powers can bear good fruit unless they work in co-operation with others, and under the guidance of the Kindly Light. And when you have taught them all you know, you will send them forth, perhaps, into regions of light you have not yet penetrated yourselves. This is particularly true of universities; for every teacher knows he may have the privilege of pupils destined to be greater than himself.

It seems that much of our search for the light—which is a search for the Lord—has some likeness to blind night-flying. We know that truth is our target; but we are still in the dark as to how we shall find it. Does not God some-

times seem to guide us in the way a pilot is guided to his target on a kind of beam which shows us our way to the light? We so often start in darkness, we pray for his help, we listen to his inspirations and we find that—if we are docile and humbly persevering, following every beam sent out by God—we arrive at a new and fuller understanding. It may be an understanding of God, or it may be of men, or of nature.

Was it not some such guidance our forefathers were thinking of, when they chose the watchword, 'The Lord is my Light'? Great Christian teachers like St Augustine and St Bonaventure were convinced that a patient listening attitude to God's truth, whether coming from Scripture or from Nature or whatever source, is the best disposition with which to begin our search for wisdom. Newman used to say that it was the distinctively Christian virtues, such as sincerity, modesty, patience and humility, which were the best guarantees of a prudent judgment.

Yet are not many Christian people suspicious of overmuch learning? And is not learning often intolerant of religion? The Scriptures have it that 'The fool hath said in his heart: There is no God'. Yet are there not many seemingly learned people who say they know not God? Suspicion of scholarship is not really suspicion of true learning, but of superficial pretence of learning. Wisdom is never superficial. Having deep roots, it is fruitful, it serves mankind and recognises the Creator. It will not stop short at that closed view of reality which collects many truths but knows not the Truth. In Christ there is no pretence; in him all is light, and true wisdom longs to see him wholly.

Bitterness against the more fortunate may exist in those who have been denied opportunities. The answer to this is not to deprive the favoured few, but to work together to open opportunities to all that can use them. Vocations differ, but each is for the benefit of all; and the whole community should work to ensure that each can fulfil his calling.

Where religious people have feared learning, it has been due to lack of understanding or faith. Christ can redeem with his love and truth, without destroying anything of this world which is good, as Robert Grosseteste, Thomas More, Newman and other Christian leaders have taught us. The

so-called learning which opposes revelation is really fallen man's spirit of independence which is incompatible with true wisdom.

We Christian educators should go forward full of faith and courage, trusting in the Lord who is our light, his Son who is his life-giving Word, and the Spirit who unites all in harmony. Whether we say of the Father, 'The Lord is my Light', or of the Son from another Scripture, 'Come, Lord Jesus', or of the Holy Spirit, 'Send forth thy Spirit', we are praying that all three Persons of the Holy Trinity may fill us with the divine light to search for, and use fruitfully, all the truth by which man lives.

May the 'kindly light' lead us to the Truth!



### POINT OF VIEW

I HAVE been following up a most fascinating trail recently with regard to the origin of the word 'Mass'. This has always been obscure, and the explanation usually brought forward is most unsatisfactory, i.e., that it derives from the *Ite, missa est* at the close, which is also obscure in its meaning.

I once heard it said by an archaeologist who was also something of a philologist that it simply means 'the Meeting', but on what grounds I did not then ask.

Now, if taken in the sense of 'the Gathering', and especially the eucharistic gathering, the ordinary word 'mass' (with a small 'm') will be found to fit perfectly, and moreover takes us into the very 'inwards' of the Christian Mystery. For in old English it was *maesse*, in French *masse*, in Latin *massa*, and the ultimate derivation, according to the dictionaries, is from the Greek *maza*, a barley cake, and *masso*, 'I knead together'. So the underlying sense all through is to 'bring-together-into-one', especially many of the same kind into a unity, e.g., particles, grains, articles, or people of the same mind. We call a 'mass meeting' of adherents to the same political party, and speak of 'massing'