

Something Beautiful for God by Malcolm Muggeridge

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Ford Lewis Battles

At rare and mysterious intervals in the history of the Christian Church individuals appear whose lives are so radically committed to Jesus Christ that all else purportedly Christian around them is adjudged weak and pusillanimous, if not a diabolical inversion of the faith. Such Christian spirits very seldom, and certainly not directly and initially, mount a theological critique of the existing Church and its beliefs. Their way is to go to the heart of some practical matter—a grave social injustice, for example—and to *live it down*. Then they, or more likely others after them, read the theological meaning of their witness.

There is in this phenomenon of history a remarkable paradox: the inwardness of faith is reached by the outward act of love toward others; conversely, the practice of love of the brethren is reached through the inward act of faith toward God in Christ. There is a Trinity of the Christian creed: Father, Son, Holy Spirit; there is another trinity of Christian life; God, neighbor, self.

As radically as any Christian since the days of the Apostles themselves, Francis of Assisi lived out in his life this love-drenched understanding of the Way. In Francis's day, early thirteenth-century Italy, the lost segment of society was the lepers. Later, as the Franciscan movement developed, it was the unchurched multitudes of the burgeoning cities of Western Europe who received the attention of the itinerant Franciscan preachers, committed as they were to bring the Gospel to the poor and the outcasts of society. Then, as the poetry of the Franciscan movement poured forth, it brought a deeper understanding of suffering, of the Savior's love, of the religion of the heart. These three instinctive acts of Francis and his

followers—the ministry to the lepers, the ministry to the urban poor, and the lyric outpouring of poetry and music—pointed out weaknesses in the Church and in Christian society of that era. And there is a fourth and final chapter to the Franciscan epoch: Suffering banishment and excommunication for their faith, the spiritual Franciscans brought the movement to its theological culmination. Their doctrine of Evangelical Poverty, the quintessence of Francis's original message, drew condemnation from Pope John XXII, and they found themselves the enemies of the papal autarchy. Thus, out of simple acts of love toward the distressed, the neglected, came a rethinking of the faith itself—a tonic too heady, as it turned out, for the Church it had criticized in love.

In our own time, no better instance of a sagging faith reborn in the life of regenerated Christians can be found than in the life of Mother Teresa. Malcolm Muggeridge, whose sharp-tongued prose was long a feature of *Punch*, has a newly found Christian faith, and one of its first fruits is his beautiful and poetic tribute to Mother Teresa, an Albanian nun and foundress of the Missionaries of Charity, who work among the very poor and dying of Calcutta. Mother Teresa's work is well known, yet the theological consequences of her heroic band's witness have been little if ever explored. Perhaps the movement is too young to warrant such reflection on what its wider effects may be. Still, these Sisters of Charity and the needs to which they address themselves are comparable enough to earlier movements of the Spirit in the Christian Church to justify some premature historical thoughts. Given such a witness to the hopeless, dying outcasts of the Calcutta streets,

what is being said to us about modern life and about the faith in Christ many still have on their lips?

Mother Teresa long ago learned that the need of the helper is greater than the need of the helped. If asked to comment on the failure of Christianity in our time, she would obviously refrain from judging others who call themselves Christians but do not share her radical vision of the Christian life. Yet we Christians who, through Mr. Muggeridge's eyes, see the growing success of her order—not only in non-Christian India but in other traditionally Christian places and in Rome itself—can ask ourselves what her way is saying to us. She is casting three forgotten words before us: discipline, mission, charity.

Discipline first. The day of a gospel glossed over by prudent considerations of acceptability, relevance, reasonableness or tradition is at an end. The day of substituting a comfortable anthropology for a disturbing theology is over. If a new generation of Christians is to rise up in our time, some of us who profess the faith, especially the professionals, will have to start living it. We may have to cast away the impedimenta and travel light on the pilgrim way.

Mission. We will have to re-learn the lesson that the farther we reach out in love the more deeply will our faith be at home. Whatever we may say against the great missionary impulse of the nineteenth century, we must acknowledge that the sponsoring churches drew life from the bridges they built to the ends of the earth. The sponsors needed those faraway neighbors just as much as Mother Teresa's nuns need the recipients of their love and care. Denominations once evangelical, apostolical, are now but institutional caretakers, ecclesiastical holding companies of assets accumulated in a more missionary age. This is nothing new in the history of the Church, nor is the atrophy unexpected that inevitably accompanies such dilution of faith. Mission means going out in love to those most remote from us to make them closest of all to us. Without mission there is death.

Third, Mother Teresa has brought

to life once more this dead word, *charity*. The noble Anglo-Saxon word, love, immensely strong and resilient though it is, has been subjected to withering attack from every quarter. The sex-obsessed have claimed it for their own. Scheming purveyors of popular culture have shamelessly tried to monopolize its use. Tasteless religious fads have laid exclusive claim to it. So fraught with conflicting connotations is it in our time that love is almost inadequate to describe the emotion at the heart of Mother Teresa's movement. The transforming power we need is no vague, undifferentiated love; it is, rather, charity, precisely directed, paternal only in that its source is God our Father.

Mother Teresa prompts us to ask ourselves a few more hard questions. How long will we in America pursue our own happiness, heap up our wealth, indulge our appetites and despoil our patrimony? We will continue our mad course until we realize that our miserable unhappiness, our divorce, our crime, our corruption are rooted in the cult of self. How long will we talk about "victimless crimes," about the freedom of "consenting adults"? No crime is without a victim, no act of consenting adults without social consequences, no act of anger or greed goes unobserved.

Mother Teresa is holding up her standards of discipleship to our seminary professors who pleasantly adulterate the Gospel. She is measuring by her rule the leaders of our Christian churches who, by their accommodation to the "realities of life," leave those entrusted to them illiterate in the faith. She is saying to all Christians, "Follow Christ."

In the deeply poor, who have known no human concern, and whom we too see all about us, is our most direct path to the Christ we call upon in prayer and on whom we feed, the Spirit being our helper. Not in social work, however competent, not in ecclesiastical procedures, however efficient, not in alms, however generous—but in utter self-giving to the Christ in the suffering, unlovely stranger lies the secret of the transformation of life.

Decline of Ideology? edited by Mostafa Rejai

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Richard H. Cox

What though Reason forged the scheme?

'Twas Reason dreamed the Utopia's dream:

'Tis dream to think that Reason can

Govern the reasoning creature, man.

Observable in Sir Thomas More's "Utopia" are First its almost entire reasonableness. Second its almost entire impracticability. The remark applies more or less to the Utopia's prototype "Plato's Republic."
—Herman Melville

Melville suppressed this poem and its commentary from the manuscript of his first book of verse, published on the eve of our terrible Civil War. What cannot be suppressed, however, is the problem which Melville poetically articulates: What, if not reason, *can* govern the reasoning creature, man?

Melville's irreducibly brief analysis of Plato's *Republic* and More's *Utopia* suggests that he had shrewdly grasped the truth concerning classical political "utopias." That truth, today much obscured and often vehemently denied (even among academics whose life work is to mediate such matters), is this: Plato's and More's philosophical sketches of a "perfect" political order simply are not meant to be taken as blueprints for an actual political order, let alone for transforming given political orders.

Indeed, the ultimate purpose of such works is to induce moderation of the passion for justice. For such passion, when unrestrained by moderation, seeks, regardless of the consequences, to transform actual—which is to say necessarily imperfect and therefore imperfectly just—political orders into what is simply

best. Plato and More, in their respective ways, teach moderation of that passion by compelling the reflective reader to grasp the limits of human reason, the degree of human dependence on practical conditions which only divine power can change, and the intransigence of man in actual political orders.

Much of the contemporary confusion concerning Plato's and More's intention derives from the tendency to collapse classical into modern utopias. That tendency, in turn, derives at the *intellectual* level from the decisive way in which modern political philosophy—Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*, Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto*—supplanted classical political philosophy. At the *political* level it derives from the widespread diffusion of vulgarized forms of various branches of modern political philosophy. The net result is the world we now live in: a world of conflicting "ideologies"—for that is what modern political doctrines have generally come to be called by citizen, legislator and scholar alike.

Each "ideology" contains a vision of a "good society" (the phrase used by Professor Rejai). Each such doctrinal "system" commends—sometimes indifferently, often boldly, and not infrequently fanatically—to transform the shabby or the disappointing or even the monstrous reality of the actual into the pristine purity of the ideal. We live, in short, in a political and intellectual world characterized by more or less ardent attempts to *implement* the blueprints of various modern utopias.

It is perfectly understandable and desirable, then, that one of the most important (and, as it proves, demanding) tasks of contemporary so-