

...and one from a padre

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... AND ONE FROM A PADRE

CHRISTMAS — A DIFFERENT APPROACH

Christmas again — plenty of preparations — a busy time — some expectations to look forward to — and it comes and goes — you could not keep it — and already it has become a memory — was it a happy time? You know you will be asked and you are expected to say: "indeed". Time flies on at hectic speed and you are caught up again in spite of all good resolutions (or you might already have stopped making them). No wonder, some people get rather cynical about this feast — what is the use of it, one could as well do without this tam-tam! — Or is it a chance offered to us to find ourselves and some deeper meaning of our lives for which the world of science and technology can have no answer?

We know a lot about our human nature, probably too many details (which is by no means bad), but details can obstruct the vision, the whole image of man — of you — the unity of body, mind and spirit together with its basic relations to our world and the Creator.

Such a vision is out of reach for science — but not for you. Schools and universities dare not talk about it and advise the prying student to keep to what we know, the small fragments of what can be measured and statistically demonstrated. Some teachers may have the courage (or the cynicism) to refer such questions to the monk or to religion . . . not without uneasy smile. A confession of one's own failures to discover it in oneself?

Do we wonder that, especially young people — students and workers alike — feel restless and frustrated? Their grown-up teachers caught in their system have found no answer to their burning questions. Their fear of computers and robots is genuine. So the system must be wrong — let's smash it, like true leftist radicals! Or could it be restored with action of the extreme right-wing, with discipline and law and order?

Let's demonstrate — have a good fight — sit in and strike — or let's drop out, turn on the LSD or other drugs, they give at least the sensation of overcoming these limits and shock society. Nothing is solved, but new and severer problems are created. Religious groups and sects and oriental mysticism? There are perhaps a few who find some peace of mind — mostly not for long.

Is there really no answer to these most important, burning questions of human wholeness, to life and its meaning, to my own whence, where-to and why? — The Jewish Talmud tells a story of a pagan. He

came to Rabbi Hillel and asked him whether he could explain to him the essence of the Jewish Faith while standing on one leg. Hillel thought, smiled and replied: "Love your neighbour, as you love yourself! This is the entire Judaism, do it, and the rest you will find out yourself".

This reminds us of Jesus Christ (who lived around the same time or a bit later) who went a bit further, explaining with a parable who this neighbour is. "A man was on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of brigands. . . ." (Luke 10, 25 f.) — It is so well known, but seldom understood in depth. For Jesus as for any Jew, Jerusalem is the holy City, Town on the Mountain, image of the Heavens while Jericho is down in the valley of the Jordan, an image of worldly glamour and depravity.

This man really is on his way from heaven to the earth — God who has become man — Jesus himself who fell into the hands of brigands. In this way the parable of the good Samaritan has even a more stirring meaning: My next neighbour is God himself and only afterwards and because of that my fellow man (or woman) who is in need of help. So we could say: "Love the Lord, your God as you love yourself, with all your heart, your mind and soul — and the rest will follow"! This really is the key to this parable: God on the way to man — to you!

"Love him as you love yourself"! reminds me of the word of St. Augustin: "noverim — menoverim — TE"! (May I know myself — in order to know You), which again brings back the memory of the temple of Delphi where the visitor is still greeted with the word: "Gnoti s'auton" (know yourself). It is said that this is the most difficult thing in the world, could it provide the key to the answers for the problems of today?

If somebody asked me who I am, I would probably reply that I am Paul Bossard. That would satisfy him and if it does not, I would show him my passport. But if he were not satisfied and insisted that this was only a name given to me by others, he wished to know *me*, I would probably be greatly embarrassed. The only answer I could think of would be: "Find out for yourself"! But in real truth *I have to find out for myself* who I really am.

Have you ever tried to find the answer? It is difficult, I know, because I have tried and still keep trying . . . but it is rewarding if you persist long enough and it really does contain a key to many questions. Try it for yourself, if you can spare some time when you are alone and undis-

turbed, just about 10 to 15 minutes, sitting relaxed but very attentive on your chair, breathing deep down and slowly till you are quiet, getting rid of all your other thoughts, of all worries and impressions and let this question sink into you: "Who am I really? I, the one who walks and runs around — the one who wishes, thinks and strives — the one who makes decisions and can choose and is so full of worries — who is conscious of himself — who laughs and often cries in silence — who wishes to be loved — who is that inner self that takes responsibility?"

It could then happen that you wished to cry out: "My God . . . who the hell am I?" Do not laugh it off as nonsense, do not be ashamed, but let the question stand — get up and do your work, take up your problems and other thoughts, enjoy yourself . . . but return to it again the next day . . . and again . . . and again. Do not be satisfied with easy answers — do not be afraid, you will not go crazy (you do not overdo it) or become a bore to others (you do not talk about it).

You will find that you become your master, more efficient, more at peace, more caring and less selfish, and it may even lead you nearer to the mystery of God who is your "neighbour" . . . more than you would ever have suspected. You might experience what it means: "And God fashioned man from dust from the soil, then he breathed into his nostrils a breath of life, and thus man became a living being" (Genesis 2, 7). This is not history of how man came to be some thousand or ten thousand years ago, it means reality of today, for you!

Can science give security and vouch for this? Perhaps, but it will not. But this at least will be your own programme, not made by others for you. And what about the church? It seems all so "unchurch-like". It is a different approach to the same end. This path will not lead you away from your own convictions. If you have faith in Christ, you will not lose it or go astray, and if you have not — perhaps it will be given!

I can only point the direction, it is for you to find the treasure in yourself. But if you wish, I might be able to give you a hand in looking for it. All this is what Christmas is about: "God on the way to man, to you, to me. . . ." "Help me know myself that I may know you"!

Deep happiness for Christmas and the year to come,

Your padre,
Paul Bossard.