

+ **The
Christian
Mind**

How Should A Christian Think?

Harry Blamires

First Edition 1963 by S.P.C.K.
Holy Trinity Church
Marleybone Road, London

© Harry Blamires 1963

First American Edition 1978 by Servant Books
Box 8617
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107

Printed in The United States of America

ISBN 0-89283-049-2

CONTENTS

Introductory Note	vii
PART ONE	
THE LACK OF A CHRISTIAN MIND	
1 The Surrender to Secularism	3
2 Thinking Christianly and Thinking Secularly	44
PART TWO	
THE MARKS OF THE CHRISTIAN MIND	
1 Its Supernatural Orientation	67
2 Its Awareness of Evil	86
3 Its Conception of Truth	106
4 Its Acceptance of Authority	132
5 Its Concern for the Person	156
6 Its Sacramental Cast	173
Postscript	189

ITS SUPERNATURAL ORIENTATION

A PRIME MARK of the Christian mind is that it cultivates the eternal perspective. That is to say, it looks beyond this life to another one. It is supernaturally orientated, and brings to bear upon earthly considerations the fact of Heaven and the fact of Hell.

In this respect the religious view of life differs so fundamentally and comprehensively from the secular view of life that it seems scarcely possible for the Christian to communicate intelligibly with the modern secularist. And indeed this is our most acute problem to-day. It seems virtually impossible to bridge the gap between ourselves and our unbelieving fellow-men so as to present to them, vividly and convincingly, the Christian view of the human situation.

The Christian mind sees human life and human history held in the hands of God. It sees the whole universe sustained by his power and his love. It sees the natural order as dependent upon the supernatural order, time as contained within eternity. It sees this life as an inconclusive experience, preparing us for another; this world as a temporary place of refuge, not our true and final home.

But outside the sphere of Christian thinking there is a totally different view of things. Modern secular thought ignores the reality beyond this world. It treats this world as The Thing. Secularism is, by its very nature,

THE CHRISTIAN MIND

rooted in this world, accounting it the only sure basis of knowledge, the only reliable source of meaning and value. Secularism puts its trust in this life and makes earthly happiness and well-being its primary concern.

The modern rejection of Christianity, rooted as it is in a hard-boiled secularism, has at its heart a total failure to sense the dependence of man, the creatureliness of man. Its most basic presupposition, implicit in all its judgements, is that this which we experience directly with the senses constitutes the heart and totality of things. Hence the collision between the Christian Faith and contemporary secular culture. For all teaching of Christian revelation deals with the breaking-in of the greater supernatural order upon our more limited finite world. That conception is at the heart of the doctrine of the Incarnation. It is at the heart of every claim to individual experience of God's love and power. The Greater breaks in upon the Smaller. But if our world here is seen as the totality of things, or even as the dominant sphere of existence, then the notion of the Greater breaking in upon it cannot be entertained. If *This World = All that Is*, then there is no *Greater-than-It* to break in upon it. The idea of God can be entertained only if you have first thought of man as someone than whom there could be Someone greater; only if you have first thought of the universe as something than which there could be Something more stable and important. Secularism is so rooted in this world that it does not allow for the existence of any other. Therefore whenever secularism encounters the Christian mind, either the Christian mind will momentarily shake that rootedness, or secularism will seduce the Christian mind to a temporary mode of converse which overlooks the supernatural.

ITS SUPERNATURAL ORIENTATION

For the truths of Christian revelation, one and all, put this life decisively within the framework of a bigger one; and the Christian mind, thinking christianly, cannot for a moment escape a frame of reference which reaches out to the supernatural.

In this respect the Christian mind has allowed itself to be subtly secularized by giving a purely *chronological* status to the eternal. That is to say, the Christian has relegated the significance of the eternal to the life that succeeds this one. In doing so, it has enabled itself to come to terms with the secular mind on a false basis. The basis is that here and now Christians and secularists can share the same conceptions, attitudes, and modes of action within the temporal sphere, since the essential difference between them—i.e. the dispute whether or not there is God's eternity beyond this world—is one which begins to be applicable only when this life is ended.

We are not suggesting that arguments of this kind are consciously articulated. They are not. We are trying to capture in words the sly process by which the Christian mind dechristianizes itself in this respect without intending to do so. Its conscious motives are good. It wants to operate in harmony with the secular mind wherever possible. Thus over laudable ventures in fruitful fields of activity—social, cultural, educational, political—the Christian comes to terms with the secularist. He argues thus: "This venture is a worthy one. These secularists are engaged in it because they are good men with high ideals anxious to serve a humanitarian purpose. Christians can co-operate with them because their work is good." Thus the Christian reasons and he acts accordingly. But, in co-operating with secularists the Christian necessarily, for all practical purposes, ceases to proclaim that in his eyes this

THE CHRISTIAN MIND

work is God's work undertaken in God's name, for God's people, in God's world. He will put into the background of his mind, when questions of policy or practice are to be discussed with the secularists, the fact that this humanitarian work is for him part of a gigantic battle between good and evil which splits the universe. He will keep quiet about the temporariness of this life, the insecurity of earthly fortune, the ceaseless creaturely dependence of man upon that which is beyond this world.

The Christian works side by side with the secularist. He prays sincerely in private about his work. But for practical day-to-day purposes he does not talk christianly about aims, plans, and policies, because he is talking to secularists. In other words, his mind ceases, at the level of communication, to think christianly. Indeed the Christian *trains* his mind, *forces* it, to think secularly—so as to help the job in hand to be done efficiently. In this way, by gradual stages, the Christian loses the habit of thinking christianly over the field of practical affairs in which he is actively involved. Setting out with the charitable aim of co-operating with good secularist activities, the Christian has slowly divested himself of the habit of thinking christianly and acquired the habit of thinking secularly, except in reference to his personal spiritual life and his private moral code.

Hence the modern Christian, a schizophrenic type who hops in and out of his Christian mentality as the topic of conversation changes from the Bible to the day's newspaper, or the field of action changes from Christian Stewardship to commercial advertising, or the environment changes from the vestry to the office. No doubt the laity are more schizophrenic than the parish priests. On the other hand observation suggests

ITS SUPERNATURAL ORIENTATION

that bishops and other high dignitaries are more schizophrenic than either.

This charge needs to be explained. One may be frankly and overtly schizophrenic, or one may blanket the duality. Thus the Christian layman who joins in the secular meeting may very well say to himself: "It's no good talking about the Kingdom of Heaven or eternal salvation to these chaps to-day. It's very vital to the work in question. Indeed for me, privately speaking, it's crucial. But for them it's meaningless. There's a common job to do that is worth doing. So I'll forget about that kind of thing for the time being." Now this kind of thinking is not perhaps excusable: but it is certainly understandable. It results in Christian silence. The particular discussion and action go forward in the absence of specifically Christian thinking—with no infusion from the Christian mind. But note: no one imagines, no one pretends that Christian thinking has contributed at the conscious level to the total venture.

Perhaps the nature of our charge against higher ecclesiastical dignitaries is now becoming clear. By the very nature of their position, they are involved officially—on platforms, on committees, as chairmen, as overseers—in many laudable activities dominated by secular thinking, of an educational, social, or cultural kind. In the discussion of practical affairs these dignitaries find themselves in exactly the same position as the schizophrenic Christian layman. No one else is thinking in terms of an earthly life played out in time against the background of eternity with the issue of salvation as its dominating concern. So the bishop pushes that kind of thing to the back of his mind and joins the discussion with a mind operating within the accepted secular frame of reference. But there is a difference. As a

THE CHRISTIAN MIND

bishop, by virtue of his office, of his known ecclesiastical dignity, he feels it his inescapable duty to drag in the Christian overtone. It may be merely that he says a brief prayer at the beginning of the meeting. Or it may be that he remarks how the Church is very concerned about this or that social problem too. Or it may be that he inserts the odd pious platitude—"I'm sure God's blessing will be upon this" or "We must all pray that this will succeed". Whatever it is, the final result is, if I am right, an unfortunate one. For the impression is left that here *the Church has made its contribution*, that the Christian view has been heard along with others, that in fact the Christian mind has been at work.

The frankly schizophrenic layman makes no pretence and gives no impression of having brought the Christian mind to bear upon the secular venture. But the bishop, or other dignitary, is involved in a pretence. The effect of his action is that everybody assumes, and talks as though, the Christian mind has been at work, when in fact its operation has as usual been forcibly suppressed. This may well become a more and more urgent matter as the tide of secularism swells. It is time that our bishops and higher clergy, cushioned as they are by status from many of the frustrations of parish priests and laity, re-examined very carefully the ventures to which they ought to give authoritative official support and the manner in which that support ought to be given. Otherwise the situation, already not unknown, will more frequently develop, in which humbler Churchmen are striving to introduce an element of Christian thinking into various activities of our culture, whilst from the ecclesiastical heights the false impression is being officially conveyed that these activities already go forward under the impetus of a thoroughly Christian purpose.

ITS SUPERNATURAL ORIENTATION

It needs no argument to prove that the supernaturally orientated view of the human situation proper to the Christian mind is remote indeed from the view nourished by secular culture. This is most clearly shown at the popular level. Turn to the glossy magazines, to the sensational press, to the cinema, T.V., and the like. Ask yourself what kind of a world is pictured there. Is it the world known vividly to the Christian mind? A world in which angel and demon are locked in conflict? A world packed full of sinners desperately dependent upon the mercy of God? A world amok with fundamentally powerless creatures, running hither and thither, foolishly imagining that they can do without God, and making an appalling mess of things as a result? A world voyaging like a little vessel across the sea of time, taking its passengers to their final home? A world fashioned by God, sustained by God, worried over by God, died for by God?

Is that the world represented by our Press and radio and T.V., our journalists and politicians? No. The secular mind has a totally conflicting view of our world and our situation in it. The world pictured by modern secularism and present to current popular thinking is very different. It is a self-sufficient world. It is a world whose temporality is conclusive and final, whose comprehensiveness of experience embraces all that is and that will ever be. It is a world run by men, possessed by men, dominated by men, its course determined by men. It is a world in which men have got things taped. The secular mind feels that things are, on the whole, under control. There may be temporary difficulties of course—like the East-West tension—but we're doing pretty well on the whole. Witness our rising standard of living, our highly organized civilization, our social services and the like.

THE CHRISTIAN MIND

The Christian mind looks at the propaganda of modern secularism and is astonished to learn that under man's management the world is supposed to be on the whole in a tolerable shape. The normal course through life is pictured as a progress through an increasing number of acquisitions and comforts. You get a house, then you get a fridge, then you get a telly, then you get a car; and all the time you are peacefully maturing, with a pretty young wife at your side, from youth to early middle age. For in the world of advertisements no man ever grows older than thirty-five and no woman grows older than twenty-seven. It is a cosy picture of life, full of colour and ease. There is always plenty to eat and drink. The furniture never gets old or drab. The wallpaper never peels off the walls. The sun shines. The gardens appear to weed themselves. There is no pain, except for a fleeting hint of indigestion which can be magically whisked away by the right pills.

The Christian mind is shocked, bewildered, and, as it seems, rendered impotent to communicate meaningfully with a secular mind so cut off from its dearest and most illuminating presuppositions. Therefore the Christian mind instinctively withdraws, turns its attention to other matters—say, the individual spiritual life, or the problem of Church disunity.

Of all the marks of the Christian mind, its supernatural orientation is the most important for anyone considering the collision of the Christian mind with the secular mind in the modern world. For it is the rootedness of the secular mind in the natural order which produces the most fundamental and violent clash with specifically Christian thinking. This is true at all levels, from the scholarly level at which rationalists or positivists collide with theologians, to the popular level at

ITS SUPERNATURAL ORIENTATION

which the glossy magazine picture of life closes the blinkered mind to the Church's account of the human situation. Nevertheless the attention given to this topic in the present book is intentionally limited. That is because I have already investigated in detail elsewhere many aspects of this particular collision between the Christian mind and the secular mind, and more especially the process by which the Christian mind can be secularized by the weakening of its supernatural orientation. (See *The Faith and Modern Error*.)

But we cannot escape the necessity of summing up at this point some of the crucial differentiae of the Christian mind as endowed with the eternal perspective.

The Christian mind's realization that all is not over when you die is something which affects not only the future but the present. To believe that men will be called to account for each wrong committed and each good committed is itself enough to give an urgency to human deliberations and decisions which the secular mind cannot sense. When one weighs the full momentousness of this particular distinction between the Christian mind and the secular mind, one is awestruck. What price are we paying, in terms of intellectual clarity and integrity, for the continuance of easy co-existence of the Christian mind with the secular mind? ~~Ponder the violence of the concealed collision.~~ On the one hand is the assumption that all is over when you die; that after sixty or seventy years, sheltered and cushioned by the Welfare State, you can sign off for good; that eating, sleeping, growing, learning, breeding, and the rest, constitute the total sum of things; that in worldly prosperity and well-being lies the source of all meaning and value. On the other hand is the almost crushing awareness of a spiritual war tearing at the heart of the

THE CHRISTIAN MIND

universe, pushing its ruthless way into the lives of men—stabbing at you now, now, now, in the impulses and choices of every waking moment; the belief that the thoughts and actions of every hour are moulding a soul which is on its way to eternity; that we are choosing every moment of our lives in obedience or disobedience to the God who created and sustains all that is; that we are always responsible, always at war, always involved in what is spiritual and deathless; that we are committing ourselves with every breath to salvation or damnation.

Do we, as Christians, mentally inhabit the world presented to us by the faith of the Church as the real world? Do we mentally inhabit a world with a Heaven above it and a Hell beneath it; a world in which man is called to live daily, hourly, in contact with the God whom neither time nor space can limit? Do we, as Christians, mentally inhabit an order of being which is superior to decay and death?

~~This book is not about Christian behaviour, but Christian thinking. I do not ask what is our moral condition, but what is our mental condition. The question is, do we in our thinking generally take into account the Christian view of life's significance as exemplified above? Do we bring this kind of picture of the human situation to bear upon our discussion of human affairs, allowing it to determine our contribution to the secular activities in which we are involved? Do we, in this respect, think christianly? The truth is that for the most part we don't. Our personality may bear the imprint of our attempts to live the spiritual life. Our moral conduct may be determined by the Christian code. But, generally speaking, we fail completely to introduce into the mental and deliberative life of society a strain of thinking wholly coloured by that tinta which bespeaks a~~

ITS SUPERNATURAL ORIENTATION

supernatural orientation. In short we ensure that there shall be no vigorous Christian mind helping to determine the character of contemporary culture.

The collision between the Christian mind and a solidly earthbound culture ought to be a violent one. In fact the impact does not occur; for the Christian lays aside the presuppositions proper to a supernaturally orientated personality when he steps outside the sphere of specifically religious activity or of personal morality. He speaks the language of secularism.

The Church's present neglect of the intellectual element in modern life may prove to be a very costly one. And by "intellectual element" I mean, not only the activity of professional intellectuals from which theology is so notably absent, but also the mental activity which goes on in the minds of all men as a background and basis for their practical decisions and activities. The bland assumption that the Church's life will continue to be fruitful so long as we go on praying and cultivating our souls, and irrespective of whether we trouble to think and talk christianly, and therefore theologially, about anything which we or others may do or say, may turn out to have dire results. Already the deference shown to Christian attitudes is wearing thin in some circles. The conventional polite allowance that at least "there must be something in it—something behind the line these Christians take" is made with increasing grudgingness. The suspicion grows apace that our inhibiting slogans are mere postures concealing an arid emptiness, mere expressions of an irrational resistance to progress.

This is not an attack upon the Church. We grant that in many fields of activity our Church is alive and busy. One can point to parishes where the faithful worship

THE CHRISTIAN MIND

dutifully, where fellowship is strong and vital, where devout priests are preoccupied with the pastoral and spiritual care of their people. There, one can say, the Church is about its proper work. It is bringing God's people to our Lord in regular worship and prayer; it is exhorting them to live the Christian life. Then again, our Church speaks wisely on many questions of personal morality. And it provides the nourishment and the environment by which men can be disciplined in the spiritual life. There is no lack of clear leadership and direction to us in our efforts to root our personal lives in our Lord's by the practice of prayer and meditation.

But, amid all this ferment of social and pastoral activity, of ethical and spiritual exhortation, the mind of modern man is neglected and forgotten. For the Christian mind is no longer cultivated. The Christian mind is too provocative, too dangerous, too revolutionary perhaps. If nourished, if fed fat on the milk of the word, it will perhaps collide so violently with the secular mind which dominates our comfortable and complacent set-up that we Christians shall find ourselves, mentally at least, persecuted again.

We prefer to let sleeping dogs lie, and shut our eyes to the price that may have to be paid for neglect. It will not be the penalty of persecution. Nothing so noble as martyrdom, even mental martyrdom. The reward of our neglect will be *their* neglect: indifference, the averted eyes and turned heads of those who have no longer the time to listen to mere sentimentalists. And if, too late, we challenge the secularists for an explanation of why the Church is now ignored, the reply will be a simple and clear one—"My dear fellow, your Christian morality is fine up to a point: for centuries it has saved us from barbarism. Your Christian

ITS SUPERNATURAL ORIENTATION

spiritual culture is a remarkable phenomenon: certainly it has extended the reach of human penetration as remarkably as did the great mysticisms of the East. Your Christian fellowship is often wonderfully healing and healthy: it has enriched the lives of many who in the pre-psychiatric period might have succumbed to frustration and pain. . . . But of course all these things are invalid; for your central teachings are wholly incredible, your theology a tangle of outmoded obscurantist metaphysics, your basic doctrines utterly discredited, your view of man's situation and destiny totally incompatible with modern knowledge."

The danger that we shall find ourselves, not in isolated instances, but as a general and accepted feature of life, face to face with this kind of charge, is not remote. It is made all the more menacing by our steady failure to think christianly; by our quiet suppression, in deference to secularism, of those who would bring theology into every committee room and classroom and office like a banner.

A resistance stirs within us. Do we *want* our theology paraded thus? As natural men, no. We do not want it any more than we want the discipline of the Christian moral code, the discipline of penitence, the painful call to self-surrender. But if it is the intellectual expression of that Faith by which we live, how can our minds work christianly without it?

Wherever men think and talk, the banner will have to be raised. Not, of course, for the purpose of pursuing a ceaseless propaganda campaign, but for the purpose of pursuing clarity and integrity. Not that we should convert, but that we should be understood. Not that the Christian mind should become the immediate and overwhelming vehicle of all truth to all men, but that the

THE CHRISTIAN MIND

Christian mind should be recognized for what it is: something different, something distinctive, something with depth, hardness, solidity; a pleasure to fight with and a joy to be beaten by.

If the day comes when the Church is no longer listened to where men meet to nourish and sharpen the intellect, the struggle to establish a Christian culture will have been lost. If to-day the Church is silent and inert at those points of our civilization where the thinking of the age is hammered into shape, where decisions are made and actions planned, or where the minds of future generations are moulded, its influence upon the twentieth-century will be rotted at the core. The Catholic tradition of our Church is that the Christian life is a life for the full man. There is no room in Christendom for a culture of the spirit which neglects the mind, for a discipline of the will which by-passes the intellect. It may be that the dominant evil of our time is neither the threat of nuclear warfare nor the mechanization of society, but the disintegration of human thought and experience into separate unrelated compartments. For a feature of the diseased condition of modern society is the parcelling out of human faculties—physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual—into distinct categories, separately exploited, separately catered for. Man is dismembered. In the high incidence of mental disease you can measure something of the cost of this dismemberment. In so far as the Church nurtures the schizophrenic Christian, the Church herself contributes to the very process of dismemberment which it is her specific business to check and counter.

For the Church's function is properly to reconstitute the concept and the reality of the full man, faculties and forces blended and united in the service of God. The

ITS SUPERNATURAL ORIENTATION

Church's mission as the continuing vehicle of divine incarnation is precisely that—to build and rebuild the unified Body made and remade in the image of the Father. The mind of man must be won for God.

One is tempted at this point to list those topics and activities which assume a different aspect when there is brought to bear upon them a mind which reckons, not just with time, but with eternity; not just with human life-spans, but with destinies beyond the grave. In fact, of course, the list would be endless. It is clear, for instance, that any issue or activity which touches upon death will assume a different appearance and character when viewed in the light of an eternal perspective. Thus such controversial topics and activities as those of war, capital punishment, euthanasia, suicide, the use of life-prolonging drugs, and indeed the whole of medical practice and ethos, will inevitably look different to the mind surveying the human scene in the light of eternity. The dispute whether death is the end of all known and assured existence or the beginning of a life surer and less confined will inevitably provoke conflicting attitudes to the topics mentioned above. But, in a sense, death is relevant to every human issue, every earthly activity, since it raises the question of the significance and status of all that transpires terrestrially. And if death is universally relevant, then it follows that the Christian's eternal perspective is universally relevant too.

Obviously, for instance, the eternal perspective totally alters the character of suffering, failure, destruction—anything which seems, in one way or another, to knock the bottom out of earthly life. Disease and suffering, in so far as they reduce man's total experience of

THE CHRISTIAN MIND

existence here to something not worth having in itself, cannot be reconciled with the demand of the human mind for justice and meaning in things, unless there is that beyond this life and outside this world which both compensates for suffering and transforms its total significance. When you contemplate the spectacle of a girl almost wholly paralysed as a result of a car accident, say, and condemned to a life of near total immobility, speechlessness, blindness, you will see the tragedy either as the last word in that poor creature's knowledge and taste of being, or as something which is to be swept away beyond death in a new, richer, fuller life. In the former case, you will surely wish only to tear the universe in pieces. In the latter case, you will surely know that the only thing to do is to pray.

The experience of physical disease and disability, the frustration of fine efforts and aspirations, the disappointment of long-cherished hopes—all these experiences, common and fundamental to human life, have their essential character and meaning determined for us and for all men by whether they are thought about christianly or secularly—whether they are conceived against the background of a limited finite existence which is but the prelude to eternity, or against the background of a human course on earth that is finally and exclusively man's full destiny.

But, of course, just as the eternal perspective transforms the character of anything which touches on death, of anything which is sad, painful, or disastrous—war, famine, earthquake, sickness, insanity—so too the eternal perspective transforms the character of earthly success, prosperity, and pleasure.

For the Christian mind earthly well-being is not the *summum bonum*, as pain and death are not the worst evil.

ITS SUPERNATURAL ORIENTATION

Eternal well-being is the final aim and end of things here. This means that success and prosperity within the earthly set-up cannot be regarded as a final criterion. Nor indeed can happiness within time be regarded as a final criterion.

The overriding and comprehensive aims of the Christian mind thus clash violently with those of the secular mind: their judgements upon particular human affairs conflict correspondingly. On the one hand, say, the secular mind's reasoning about nuclear war is often determined by the proposition that the destruction of civilization and perhaps of human life on this planet would be in itself the last and final evil—beyond which nothing. On the other hand the secular mind's reasoning about, say, divorce and remarriage is largely determined by the presupposition that individual happiness during life on this planet is the only sure well-being, and that there can be no binding obligations which conflict with its demands.

We have now established that the Christian mind, by cultivating the eternal perspective, will bring a totally different frame of reference to bear upon all that touches human success or human failure, human joy or human misery, human health or human pain. In short there is nothing in our experience which will not look different to the Christian mind than to the secular mind. And many of the issues and activities which will be most vitally transformed by being regarded christianly are precisely those which are with us now as constant topics of public controversy—war, crime, delinquency, disease, divorce, insanity, vice. The question what is to be done about these problems is a very different question faced christianly and faced secularly, in that the pursuit of temporal well-being gives a twist to human thinking

THE CHRISTIAN MIND

which the pursuit of eternal well-being will not always condone or permit. Fortunately, of course, practical programmes can often be hit upon which Christian and secularist can alike approve — if sometimes for different reasons. It is plain that the best treatment for appendicitis or tuberculosis is determined by technical considerations into which philosophical or theological presuppositions do not enter — except at the almost universally agreed level of such platitudes as, It is better to heal than not to heal. But, on the other hand, the question of what is the best method of dealing with prostitution or homosexuality could not be settled, even at the immediate practical level, on the basis only of an agreed technology.

The dominant concern in this book is that there is no living Christian dialogue on most of the topics just mentioned. Or, if you like, that no stream of Christian thinking flows recognizably into the secular dialogues now being carried on. By and large, we have to admit that there is no general awareness in our society of a prevalent mentality that would bring to bear upon all the gravest issues of our time the perspective of eternity. When the Christian speaks, to the subject of war, delinquency, disease, vice, and so on, we do not find that the audience stirs itself and prepares to hear something *different*, prepares to listen to a mind which will flood the topic of controversy with that distinct and distinctive light which must always flow from bringing into view a new dimension — the dimension of eternity.

We have become afraid of our own convictions. And our fear has not been, in this respect, a wholly unworthy one. History has been full of warnings against the damage which fanatical dogmatists can do to human

ITS SUPERNATURAL ORIENTATION

society and to the Church itself. No men more loudly and impressively than the officers of the Holy Inquisition claimed that temporal well-being must be subordinated to eternal well-being; that physical pain and earthly suffering were as nothing when weighed in the balance against the damnation of a soul. One might go further and say that no body of men more strenuously strove to preserve the distinctness and distinctiveness of the Christian mind. We have perhaps been frightened too much by horrors of that kind. It is because the devil is an angel that his evil power is so poisonous. It is because the inquisitors had a crucial element of truth mixed up with their dismal self-deceptions that the perversions they represented were so diabolical.

Twentieth-century Christendom errs and no doubt will continue to err — but it will not err in the direction of the Inquisition. Rather, through reacting against excessive dogmatism, against exclusiveness, against withdrawal from the proper activities of the world, it may destroy through a too yielding compliance with secularism, a too easy commerce of mind with mind, that powerful and lucid rational construction which constitutes its divinely guaranteed estimate of life.