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"..... MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS"

by C.G. Martin

"We have piped to you and you have not danced; we have mourned to you and you have not lamented." There was no pleasing the opponents of our Lord. And there is no pleasing many of our own contemporaries. We are accused of 'pedalling sectional interests' (to quote John Redfern's introduction to CBRF 3) if we try to tackle pressing social problems in a truly Christian spirit; by those unconcerned we are dismissed along with other 'do-gooders'. If we fail in this involvement we are accused of isolation and leaving the world to men of business and the devil. Nor do we fare less roughly at the hands of fellow-believers. We are on the one hand told to get on and 'save souls from the wreck' and not mess about with jobs the welfare state does anyway; on the other we are adjured to pay attention to the true meaning of the parable of the good Samaritan. We are exhorted alternately to show the love of God to the world, and to be unworldly; to 'go where the fish are', but not to get wet.

Mercifully it is not our concern to please men but God. There is, however, no reason why we should confuse men into the bargain. Yet I feel that much of our language and thought form must strike the uninitiated as paradoxical, face-saving, or just incomprehensible. "You don't begin to LIVE," says the evangelist, "till you're a Christian", and to his occasional unconverted hearer he appears to be drawing up a profit and loss account between the blessings of the Gospel and the pleasures of sin, between 'the whole world' and some part of him referred to as 'soul'. Even if the hearer heavily discounts the 'pie in the sky when you die', he gets the impression that he is being sold Christianity because it pays. Personal testimonies so often run the same line. The dialogue might run:-

"So you think you enjoy your church service more than the fellowship of the pub?"

"Certainly - so would you if you were a Christian."

"Well, I'm not. So you go ahead and enjoy yours, and I'll enjoy mine."

"But it's not right to ignore Christ in your life."

"Who said anything about 'right'? You're arguing from enjoyment, and I'm enjoying myself fine."

No wonder the hearer is bewildered when next week he hears a sermon about the cost of discipleship. "It's a hard break, but it's got to be made." He is exhorted to face the challenge, to give up all if need be. How does this fit in with the enjoyment? "Oh, well, you see, it's hard to give up x, y and z, but since you afterwards find they're no good to you anyway, you find the sacrifice is worth it." "Worth it!" - so we're back again at what we get out of it. And, further, when he analyses closely our way of life, he may come to the conclusion that it gives us just as much ease, self-satisfaction and pleasure as he gets from his, and dismisses the 'challenge' and 'giving up' as so much histrionics. The third week he is bombarded with theological propositions about sin, atonement, and faith, which he is asked to believe and endorse. It sounds a perfectly valid scheme whereby the past can be forgotten, guilt complex removed, mental integration achieved. This, too, would seem to be something one 'gets out of it'. Also it seems to suggest a division in personality - a lower part that is renounced, and a higher part that sees what is good for it.

This is not dragged in to debunk modern preaching (though I welcome anything that makes my own or others' attempts at preaching more soundly Biblical and more readily comprehensible). It is an illustration of the problem we face in meeting the argument 'Everyone only acts for themselves really'. "Doth Job serve God for nought?" There appears to be a distressing revival of this cynical approach, particularly among sixth-form and student folk, who use it to insulate themselves from any serious thinking about the Gospel. Its label in the philosophical archives is 'psychological hedonism' and some outline of it will be found in most primers on ethics, or from an encyclopedia article or biography of Bentham. Every case of self-sacrifice you quote is side-tracked with "Well, he enjoys doing it". Alice becomes an almoner in Altrincham, Peter a probation officer in Poplar, Dick a doctor in Dacca, because it gives them pleasure, a sense of fulfilment, and so on. If this seems trivial to you, try arguing with a mod. who knows a bit of the jargon. In case anyone has not given this much serious thought, it might be in order to point out one logical deficiency in the system.

He: Your Bible-translator in Borneo in fact does it because it gives him pleasure.

You: Pleasure! He's given up a comfortable home to live in a log-house: given up a good career for mere sustenance: left cultured company for primitive illiterates . . . . .

He: But he thinks the thrill of giving them the 'word of God' in their own language is worth all this. It's the pleasure that counts - only he rates spiritual pleasure above physical ease.

You: But he says he felt it his duty. He did it for the love of God.

He: That's his rationalisation. Of course he isn't going to admit he's selfish.

You: He's wrong in his statement, then?

He: Yes - but not necessarily consciously, of course.

You: But how can you prove that in face of his evidence?

He: By the facts. He went, didn't he? He's given up a lot, hasn't he? Well, he wouldn't do that if he wasn't going to get more satisfaction by going than staying, would he?

Which is what he is trying to prove. His thesis to be proved becomes an a priori postulate.

This will not of course convince your protagonist, but we may as well try to demonstrate that he has not got a necessary logical refutation of Romans 15:1-3.

Well, then, if argument will not convince, what are we to do? We must say something, as Augustine pointed out, because we cannot keep silence. But this will never be more than part of our duty. I suggest the situation calls for a reassessment of our concept of Christian discipleship. Men heard the sayings of Christ: they also saw His living demonstration of the self-giving of God: they were not all pleased, but they all saw: and, whether convinced by argument or stung to awareness by personal encounter with such a life, some followed. He intends that the pattern should be the same, only now the revelation is of His word through the mouths of His people, and His life through their living.

The church's job is not to proselytise or gain converts, but to make disciples. The verb 'to disciple' occurs twice in the active voice - once (Matt.28:19) in the command to do it, and once (Acts 14:21) in the record of its being done. It is one of the many tragedies of translation that Jerome chose docete (teach) for this verb in his Vulgate. We do not exhaust this command of Christ by imparting information. Our task is not complete when we have 'told them'. This 'making disciples' is a more comprehensive duty of which 'teaching' (v.20) is only a part. Nor is the 'baptising' just a

ceremonial duty. To 'disciple' is to obtain for Christ the serious, diligent and informed allegiance of those we deal with. The subject clearly warrants close and more detailed examination.

BECOMING A DISCIPLE. From the sayings of our Lord, this clearly is a total commitment, involving the whole man. It is not paying attention to one part - getting one's 'soul' saved, much as one might get one's hair cut. Clearly the immediate incentive may differ from case to case: "I came to Jesus as I was, weary and worn and sad", "I bring my sins to Jesus", "Open mine eyes, O Lord, to see", and many others are genuine expressions of the different attitudes of heart and mind in which people start their discipleship. But unless the whole person is involved, we may justly doubt the reality of Christian profession.

This is well illustrated in Matt.11:28. The invitation is not to give a part, but to make a personal encounter: "Come". "Take my yoke" suggests the forging of a permanent link with the lord and teacher. If we lag behind or push ahead, the yoke will chafe. If we progress steadily with Him, we find it 'easy'. A major part of being yoked to Him is the 'learning of Him' (not only ABOUT Him) the cardinal virtues of the disciple, meekness and lowliness. These are not propositions of the intellect, nor even isolated acts of will, 'decisions'; rather they are the steady disposition and attitude of the whole life: and they form the hall-mark of Christianity in Gospels and Epistles alike (2 Cor.10:1; Gal.5:23, 6:1; 1 Tim.6:11; 2 Tim.2:25; Titus 3:2; Luke 1:52; Rom.12:16; Jas.1:9, 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5; Phil.2:8 - and a concordance will furnish many more). The idea that humility is a virtue - let alone one of the major virtues - is original in Christianity. The Greeks appear to have regarded it as weak and unworthy of a cultured person; to them this would indeed involve repentance (ie. change of entire attitude).

THE MARKS OF DISCIPLESHIP. If 'salvation' is mainly propositional, then it is easy to ascertain by suitable questioning whether a man is 'saved', and we are prone both to accept and reject people very easily on the basis of the adequacy of their mental response to the 'plan of salvation'. But for discipleship, there is no such easy yardstick. Christ Himself gives three major marks of the disciple:-

Continuance (John 8:31). Whatever other factors are involved in a doctrine of assurance, this is one reason for the confidence of the individual believer (Acts 26:22) as it is a powerful evidence to the outside observer.

Love to other disciples (John 13:35). This does not involve uniformity or universal agreement, but the settled disposition of the will to seek the other's good. It was to be the distinguishing mark of the Christian community, following the example of His loyalty, reproof, forbearance, encouragement, to the twelve: "As I have loved you".

Fruitfulness (John 15:8). The reality of the inward joining to Christ becomes obvious in the outward orientation and activity of the whole person. "Ye are the branches" and life of the Vine flows through every twig, perhaps in differing volume, "as God has dealt to every man", but not differing in character. The life of Christ in my prayer is not a super-octane version of the same life in my business decisions or relations at home. The fruit is of many kinds (Gal.5:22-23) appropriate to the different spheres, but it is the one fruit of a unified commitment.

All these marks of discipleship shout loudly that our duty is to relate Christ to the whole man, his thinking, loving, private, social, business, leisure and all other activities. Mr. Blamires in his stimulating book 'The Christian Mind' argues that there are wide areas where Christians accept a non-Christian account of life simply in default of any serious relation of Biblical doctrine to that field. If our preaching leaves large areas of human activity unmentioned, our hearers may well feel that we offer only some other society to add to their present connections with the Rotary Club, the Chess Club and the Morris Dancing Group. We tend to react strongly against such comparisons and so stress the

COST OF DISCIPLESHIP. His Chess Club costs him only a few guineas a year, and he gets much enjoyment from it. We will show him that Christianity is of sterner stuff. We will read him Matt.10:5-27 and tell him of places where this is painfully true - Eastern Germany, South America, where many Christians indeed "endure to the end" in their confession of Christ before men. Our hearer blandly asks what this has to do with him and us in Britain. Most of the Christians, he finds, who claim to be persecuted for righteousness' sake, bring it upon themselves. We are to endure persecution if it comes: we are nowhere commended to seek it. A second century writing celebrates the bravery of the aged Polycarp, who, dragged from his hiding place, refused to renounce Christ. The writer adds however that one Quintus "forced himself and some others to come forward .. we praise not those who deliver themselves up since the gospel doth not so teach us." There is a sort of glamour attaching to this type of opposition which may even tempt us away

from meekness and lowliness. We may put our necks under the yoke of Christ, but not stick them out unnecessarily otherwise. This passage does, however, contain a deeper statement. "It is enough for the disciple that he be as His Lord". In our affluent, sophisticated Western society we may well ask ourselves what sort of house in what sort of district Jesus would live in; what sort of car he would run; what sort of record library, bookshelf, colour photography equipment or tape-recorder he would have. Do the common people "hear us gladly"? He received sinners and outcasts and shared His meals with them. Luke 9:23 makes the same point even more powerfully. It was said "to all" - this is not an 'upper-stream Christianity for Loyola and Francis of Assissi. It is arguable that such extreme asceticism itself springs from a forcing of the Greek body-soul antithesis into a Gnostic dualism, rather than a true subordination of every part and activity of the personality to the interests of God. "Let him deny himself". It is here that our malformed doctrines of man may lead us into linguistic dead-ends. What is the self to be denied, and who is to deny it? Are we to postulate a regenerate 'soul' which says 'no' to the enticements of the devil acting upon unregenerate 'flesh'? Is Christ adumbrating the Pauline teaching of Gal.5:17; Rom.6:13? Do we postulate a 'responsible I' as a third party arbitrating between flesh and spirit - and how does this differ from the psychologist's super-ego? Do we dispose of our 'members' as the foreman deploys his men, and who are "we" that do the disposing? Mercifully Christ's listeners were Hebrews, with minds clear of the subtleties of Greek analysis. Paul was later inspired to give whatever expression is possible to non-Hebrew minds nurtured in the Platonic mould. (Even so we may note he does not follow the Greek soma-psuche (body-soul) antithesis but sets them both against pneuma (spirit), e.g. 1 Cor.2:14). But Peter and his friends knew without doubt what Christ meant. To them it was a simple reflexive verb. Similar constructions in Matt.4:6, 8:4; Luke 4:23; Acts 16:28 present no difficulty. In the action, the distinction between subject and object has no relevance. What Christ is insisting upon is not the repudiation of this or that part of our existence, but the taking up of an attitude by the whole. It is not 'self-denial' in the sense of going without sugar in Lent, or giving up smoking: not even the repression of our cultural 'selves' because of the evil associations of the theatre or concert. It is rather a true 'repentance', a change of attitude so complete, so unrestrained, that we take up the cross and follow Him. In the language of Rom.12 we offer our 'bodies' (Mr. Dibbons will point out another example of synecdoche) a living sacrifice to God.

Here is the true cost of discipleship: the end of the 'sinful quest for intellectual autonomy', the end of comfortable insulation from the sorrows and pressures of 'other men', the end of fancied superiority or self-sufficiency, the beginning of the learning of Him who is meek and lowly in heart. And yet this will provide no glamour, no aura of piety and sacrifice. It may be our Christian duty to maintain a certain standard of table and living. It may be our Christian duty to exercise authority, to recognise that we know more than those we teach, see further than those we direct. We may have to declare the word of God with authority, to "reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and patience". 'My station and my duty' must be determined in an attitude of openness to the mind of Christ. Having found his will in these respects I am to live within them with humble grace, without apology, without embarrassment, because I follow Him who went His way with supreme grace, conviction and unembarrassed ease.

But how to convey this 'cost' to our hearers. Perhaps it cannot be fully done in words. And yet we are to "make disciples". How? By the combined influence of word and life: the whole word of God related to all human situations - not a selective 'salvation of the soul' as if it were a technical operation that happened to a part, but a 'making whole of the entire life'. And not only with our lips but in our lives - not saying without going, nor going without saying. This calls for discipline indeed.

PRIVILEGES OF DISCIPLESHIP may be mentioned. You will find them, for example, in Psalm 25; John 8:31; Luke 6;40 Luke 22:28; 1 Cor.13:12 and elsewhere. Perhaps the most thrilling is Luke 6:40 - when he is fully trained he will be like His Lord. Also Matt.13:52 draws the splendid picture of the steward 'disciplined to the kingdom of heaven' who can meet every emergency because he has built up a treasure from which he brings the right thing for each situation.

Is it then 'worth it' after all? Have I arrived back where my hedonist objector said I would? Certainly not. This putting of oneself at the divine disposal is not a 'paying proposition' but a 'reasonable service'. The 'reasonable' (logikos), we might almost say 'logical outcome',of the theology and world view of Romans 1-8 and 9-11 is the dedication of 12:1. It is by such dedicated living, as much as by sharp argument, that we may in our own day meet the resurgence of the psychological hedonist.

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