

FUNDAMENTAL DISQUIET IN ALL HUMAN EXISTENCE

by Fr Paddy

Mankind and the church are wounded at the beginning of this new century. Our times are wounded, perhaps more than any other period of history. More than ever the world is seeking the "bronze serpent set on a pole". Christianity is the only therapy capable of healing man and contemporary society but does contemporary man know or want this.

What good is the Christian faith? This is the question that dwells in the heart of many people. A large number of our contemporaries, especially in the West, have already answered this question: The faith is good for nothing. For Western man, in the great majority of cases, the Christian faith, or any religion at all brings neither happiness nor the solution to our problems, healing for neither the body nor the heart.

And yet the happiest people in the world seem to be those with faith. Believing is a source of happiness, and religion can be for mankind like being on an oxygen supply: profoundly therapeutic for culture and society. The healing of the entire man, body, heart and soul is part of the very core of Jesus' message.

But is faith as really as therapeutic as all that? People have used faith to further their own political and misguided ends and caused havoc. But what about the inner struggles of man and woman. According to the present Pope, neuroses and psychological illnesses are invading our society like an epidemic.

Before the 18th century, the typical European lived in a harmonious universe; he was situated within a network of well integrated relationships. His relationship with God and society in general was well defined. Everything had its place and there was a place for everything. Religion was the cement which held everything together. Things changed for the 18th century onwards. Psychoanalysis, for instance identified problems associated with the repression of our sexuality and aggressiveness. They said that was the source of the sadness weighing down mankind. But what was once thought to be repressed is now taking over and becomes a requirement. They say that we live in a highly sexualised society. Sexuality has lost its mystery and become eroticism which is often commercialised. So if we have none of these 'dangerous repressions of sexuality' and aggressiveness any more why then is contemporary Man not happy? All of Western civilization is blanketed with the light and almost smiling mist of melancholy. So, it appears that man's sexual liberation is no cure for this neurosis affecting us.

Van den Berg says that we have repressed another component of our human existence, driving it out of the consciousness into the subconscious. As was thought to be the case with sexuality and aggressiveness, we have repressed the sense of God and of the transcendent. The entire realm of religion, faith and God, the domain of spirituality, is banished from everyday life or marginalised. Who cares about Christ and his redemption anymore? Our whole spiritual side has been

repressed. This is the new neurosis of our time – this is our deep wound. The neurosis of our times is our silence regarding God.

But some authors are not so pessimistic and glimpse a new dawn. Is God making a come-back? Andre Malraux remarked that the 20th century will be a metaphysical and religious century.

One of the most fundamental realities that Jesus came to reveal to mankind is the paternity of God. Psychologists have shown us the structure and essential bond of children to their father. The image of God as Father of mankind has suffered violence. I think it was Freud who said that our filial dependence on God experienced through religion is a pathological regression and keeps us from growing up. God, instead of being a loving father forces men and women into a kind of slavish dependency. Nietzsche saw this as the tragedy of man. If man is to attain adulthood, it necessary means the death of god. Some people even go so far as to say that the progress of civilization calls for the death of god. God has to die so that man can be born. Happiness for man means the death of god.

But has man really become more fulfilled as a result of choosing atheism over faith. On the contrary man has lost his soul; the world has grown cold. "When the father is gone the children are cold". When God disappears people look for other sources of warmth. We try again a reconnect with nature. People go over the top about ecological issues. Some embrace trees - something is missing. We become slaves to twitter and face book and social network sites. The absence of our common Father is betrayed by a frantic search for fraternity and cohesiveness among the orphaned children. Since god disappeared we have never witnessed such a search for communication and social engineering. But it doesn't do the trick or bring us any closer to one another. Has this anything to do with the obliteration of the God, the Father. Is universal brotherhood possible in the absence of a common Father in Heaven?

We must discover childhood and a filial relationship with the father and not see it as a repression. This is what can cure us; the recovered sense of our divine sonship.

The Father loves us gratuitously and with total acceptance. He wants to 'wed' us. God accepts us as we are – this is what can cure us. Our era is characterised by a tremendous lack of acceptance. Modern man prides himself on being tolerant. Tolerance does not mean acceptance. On the contrary it can betray a lack of love. To be accepted and to accept the other - is that not the most important form of therapy for our era. In a world that suffers so much lack of acceptance, reconciliation, and love, the Christian faith can be profoundly therapeutic. Even when we go away from the Father he still loves us and calls us back.

Contemporary man is also wounded in another way as a result of a crisis of Truth. Pilate's question - 'truth, what is that' has become our question. The very search for truth has been abandoned. The Beatles used to sing "love is all you need" but you need truth as well, or else love will be like a damp squib. "Kindness and truth shall embrace". But we must accept the whole truth. Watering down the gospel to suit us is another reason why modern man is unhappy. If God accepts us as he finds us, we should accept his as we find Him and be faithful to His Word of

Truth which will make us happy. And the word of God is comprehensible only for someone who receives it in the church's maternal bosom.