

THE RADICAL APPROACH OF CHRIST

We live today in a very different kind of world than in the time of Christ. Life was somewhat uncomplicated back then. One's time was spent mostly in trying to just live and stay alive. Most of a country's citizens were poor and uneducated. They spent their time basically just trying to survive. Most of them worked for those who were well off and could afford to hire peasants to do the menial work while they enjoyed what they considered the finer things of life. Some few developed their talents and could make a modest living selling their wares. Others simply worked hard to support their families and raise their kids hoping that they would one day be a great help for them. There were times of great peace, but there was always the threat of war, either from nearby regions or countries, or sometimes from foreign invaders. The law of the land was for all practical purposes the survival of the fittest. The highlight of their lives were the occasional religious celebrations and festivities, but other than those life was somewhat monotonous. And of course there was no health care! Life expectancy was very low.

Look at the difference of life today. How far the world has come in making life not only easier but more enjoyable, more exciting, more worthwhile in general. The poorest today could be the envy of the rich of long ago. But with all the prosperity, there is a dark side to it all. Human values are more and more becoming meaningless, irrelevant or are considered too restrictive. Freedom should rule, but for most today freedom is really license to do whatever they wish, right or wrong, good or bad. The idea that there are rules of conduct, a code of morals and virtues, simply is looked upon as something medieval, too restrictive, too confining and too religious. The culture is totally materialistic teaching that only things are the real sources of and the only way to enjoying life. Above all, religion is something to be avoided at all cost, for that implies a God and God is the most restrictive of all. Those who still believe in a God are looked upon as being spineless and totally dependent on an invisible someone. They are to be pitied, never to be followed. It is not a pretty picture! Some of this may be overstated, but the roots of it all are definitely present.

Anyone who has any education whatsoever realizes that something is radically wrong with today's society. Man's dependence on things is epidemic. Gadgets are omnipresent: cell phones, Blackberries, computers, the Internet, and now the latest from Apple the I-Pad. All these are absolute "must haves," no matter what the price. It is just amazing how many young people, even very young, and at least half of them poor, have one or several of all these latest marvels of man's creation. What is this doing to the upcoming generations?

God so loved this world that he sent his only son to become a man exactly like all human beings so that he could undo the harm of Adam and Eve's sin and restore human nature to what it was intended by God to be. This was not just a one-time event; it was for all time, even to the end of the world. God prepared the world for the coming of his Son from the very beginning in a veiled promise given to Adam and Eve that one day the snake (the devil) would nip at the heel of the offspring of a woman while her offspring would crush his head. God was patient, waiting thousands of years, but then finally stepped into human history by calling Abraham to be the father of a great nation. His offspring would be greater than the grains of sand at the sea shore and more numerous than the stars in the sky. This happened four thousand years before the Angel Gabriel came to Mary and told her that she was to be the

mother of the Son of God and she gave her full cooperation, a definite yes. Things then moved much faster: Christ was born, raised by his mother Mary and his foster father Joseph and then thirty years later stepped into human history as he began his public life. He chose twelve Apostles, making them the foundation of the church he would found. He ultimately gave his life, suffering greatly at the hands of the Jews and Romans, and was crucified. But three days later, he rose from the dead as he promised and within forty days, gave the framework for his church with Peter as its head. Then he rose up to heaven and nine days later sent the Holy Spirit on the Apostles and the Holy Spirit would from then on guide the church through the coming ages until the end of time.

But before Jesus ascended into heaven he gave them one very simple command that would bring his church through all ages if it were to be truly followed. He said to them: "I give you a new commandment; love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." This sounds so simple but it is deeply profound. Jesus was telling his Apostles that true love is the most powerful force in creation, in this world. The catch word is "as I have loved you." These simple five words give the secret of what true love is. It is a way of life; it is a whole outlook on what living should really be. It is putting one's self totally at the service of another. It is all about selflessness, thinking of others first before thinking about one's self. It is the absolute antithesis of love as the world today thinks. Perhaps it can be summed up in another saying of Christ: "Greater love than this no man has than to give his life for another". This is precisely what Christ did by allowing his enemies to arrest him, torture him, condemn him, kill him. Christ put into practice what he taught, and his Apostles learned this from watching just how he lived his life during those three years.

Is it possible that such love can actually be present today in our society, in our culture? G. K. Chesterton once remarked that the problem with Christianity is that it has never really been tried! Think about that for a minute or two. Those who truly want to follow Christ have to learn to put themselves totally at the service of others. Many today do this in admirable ways, helping out various agencies or groups devoted to helping the poor and disadvantaged. Others give of themselves in teaching the young all about our faith, volunteering in parish Religious Education programs. The number of ways in which wonderful people get involved in truly living what they believe is almost a miracle in itself. The ingenuity of people is almost limitless.

But not everyone has the time to give of themselves to any of these good works. Then it becomes necessary that one reflect on what Christ said and hopefully begin to realize that it all comes down to really living what one believes with all their heart and soul. If one is really fired with love, a love as Christ expressed it, they will slowly come to realize that this love cannot remain hidden. It radiates in everything one does or says. Can one who has just gotten engaged to marry the person of their dreams keep this hidden? Impossible; it shows in everything they do or say. Following Christ's words, one will actually be preaching by constantly making Christ present in their own little worlds through their living their faith. And they discover that by following Christ, thinking of others first before themselves, they actually have a more full and exciting life. One can in fact help save our world.

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