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The Only Reality

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Among the many designations given to responsible servants of God in the Bible is that of 'Watchman'. The function of the Watchman is so well understood that the time need not be taken to describe it. In a word, it is to be aware of both movements and their portents, and to make these known for the well-being of those for whom he has a responsibility. This was one of the functions of the Old Testament Prophets, and this aspect of prophetic ministry is implicit in the anointing of all servants of God at all times.

But this particular aspect has meant, and will always mean, that the Watchman lives before the time when that which he sees will eventuate or materialise. The New Testament Apostles were of this kind. They truly lived for their own hour and day, but they lived even more for a day to come. As Watchmen they saw the trend and significance of certain 'signs' or portents, and in this respect they lived before their time, and were only vindicated long after their departure from this earth.

We make no claim to prophetic foresight or Apostolic prevision or inspiration, but there are at the present time certain signs and indications, the significance of which, for various reasons, may not be immediately recognised; and it could be that the declaration of their meaning, as by a faithful watchman, might mean the difference between salvation and disaster for multitudes of people.

If there is one thing upon which the Bible is clear and emphatic, it is that, in all His sovereign government, God works toward *reality* at the end. The end of *every* phase of the progressive purpose of God has been marked by a sifting, challenging, and testing of things as to their reality.

This can easily be seen as the eye is cast over the various stages of the Old Testament. It is manifest again in the crisis of Christ's first advent, which, in the first instance, was a consummation of the whole Old Testament dispensation, and His judgment of that is found most pronouncedly on the very face of His life on earth. The test was that of reality, and in the balances of reality that whole system, as represented by its official class, was found so wanting as to be 'cast into the fire and burned'. The end of the New Testament sees an exact and final repetition of this judgment, this time beginning with Christianity - if you like, with the Church.

Thus, the 'eyes which are as a flame of fire' are looking for reality. They pierce through many things.

In the first place, they pierce through traditional and formal religion or 'Christianity'. Their interrogation is - Is your religion a matter of attachment or adherence to a system, a historical tradition, a family inheritance; and so on? Or is it born - is it a birth *in* you; is it something that has happened to you; is it your very life, your very being?

Secondly - and I concentrate more especially upon this for the moment - they pierce through temperament and disposition. They demand to know whether the reason why you are where you are, are concerned for what you are concerned for, are connected with what you are connected with, and are disposed as you are, is because your particular temperament leans that way. You are artistic and mystical in your tastes and constitution: therefore you choose or make your religion after your own image. Your temperament is melancholic, and so the more abstract, profound, serious, intense, introspective, and speculative, appeals to you and finds a *natural* response in you. You make God, Christianity, Christ, the Bible, after *your* image.

Or again, you are of the practical temperament. To you everything is only of value as it is 'practical'. You have no patience with these contemplative people. You are irritated by the 'Marys', for 'many dishes' are your concern. To you, how the end is reached is of much less importance than the end itself. You are not bothered much with imagination, and you would put all the value on things done - how much there is actually to show for your day. *Your* God and *your* Christianity are entirely, or almost entirely, of the practical kind, after *your* own image. And so we could go on with all the other temperaments.

But this will not do, for Christ is not any one of these; He is different. He may combine the good in all, but that does not wholly mean Divine nature. He is *different*. All this is the human soul, but the essential nature of Christ and true Christianity is of the Divine Spirit - it is heavenly! If new birth means anything, it means this, that another nature and disposition is born into the believer, so that he or she is 'carried whither they (naturally) would not'. In the hands of the Holy Spirit one thing becomes increasingly clear: it is that our temperaments or dispositions cannot carry us through the terrific testings and adversities which come peculiarly to Christians; and that another life, power, grace, is absolutely essential to our survival. The greatest, strongest, and most richly endowed servants of God have ever found this to be true.

Reality, with God, is more than sincerity, earnestness, devoutness. It is not *our* reaction to God at all. There could be no greater mistake, no more serious misdirection, no more mischievous counsel than to advise people to select the church association which best suits their temperament.

Christ and man (naturally) belong to two orders, and there is no passing from the one to the other by 'selection', or choice, or preference. And certainly not by natural affinity, for there is no such thing! With God, Christ is the only Reality, and that is not temperamental, mystical, not a matter of plain or ornate, ritualistic and ceremonial, or bare and simple. Christ, *revealed* by the Holy Spirit in the heart, as by a Divine fiat, corresponding to the "let there be light" of creation, is the only Reality!

For the present my space is gone. But I return to the governing issue. The end will be marked by an intensifying sifting, testing, fiery ordeal to find out what is real - that is, what is truly Christ - and to expose what are the artificial accretions and appendages of Christianity. This ultimate "judgment" has commenced and is verily moving over the earth. May there be found a maximum of "gold", "silver", "precious stones", and a minimum of "wood", "hay", "stubble".