CHRISTIAN HATE

By PAUL EDWARDS

[This essay is very dogmatic in tone. In intention it is purely exploratory. But since a succession of 'is it not possible thats' and 'could we tentatively suggests' might turn the heavy going into quagmire, I have preferred to lay a didactic surface, over which the mind of the reader may travel more easily, remembering that it is better to travel hopefully than to arrive.]

I SEE THAT my fellow teachers are once more asking for a pay rise and that a 6% increase won't do. At such times I, as a jesuit, can afford to feel quite unconcerned. Then I begin to feel uncomfortable because I am so unconcerned while my lay colleagues are so involved. Yet I think that if I were really drawing a salary I should sometimes feel that I ought to return part of it. I ought to do this not because of my many failures to teach. After all, the police do not solve all crimes nor the medical profession cure all sickness, and nobody docks their pay. But a doctor is not prescribed for by his patients, and a policeman, more's the pity, is not protected by the public. Yet I get quite a slice of my education from my so-called pupils.

Again I should feel a little guilty, (I have an extensive collection of guilt feelings. No occasion finds me unequipped), if I drew pay for the amount of time I spend riding my hobby horse round the classroom. One hobby horse which I sometimes trot out for exercise is the subject of love. I tell my pupils that this is the all-important subject; speak disrespectfully of Aristotle and Aquinas for upholding the primacy of the intellect; say that a worthwhile system of education would train people's power for loving other people rather than their capacity for knowing about things; and in the midst of a fair amount of rant, attempt a philosophical analysis of the subject which will cover the love of God and man, man and woman, parent and child, and the love of friends. I begin with *haecceitas*. I inform my audience that in love one penetrates to the individual, the unique, the normally incommunicable. Love is not concerned with categories but only with *this* person. Once I was halted by one of my pupils. 'That, Father, is equally true of hate. It is also focussed on the individual'. The chalk stood arrested, my talk suspended, as

I tried to fit this cogent insight into my framework. I am still trying.

On another occasion I was being eloquent about St Paul. I was trying to remove the general impression that St Paul is a grim forbidding figure. I cited many tender passages from his letters and asked whether they could possibly be the work of a frightening person. 'Of course they can', said one boy. 'It is the people who can be most tender who can be most frightening. They have the imagination and the emotional power which can be used in either direction'. On these occasons when it is the pupil who is the mouthpiece of wisdom I accept the role of educand. Not passively, of course, for assimilation is an activity and often a strenuous activity. For a long time I have been trying to ingest fully the insight learned from my pupils, that love and hate, that tenderness and anger, are uterine kin.

This truth toned well with the fact that the God of the scriptures is both tender and terrible. Those who never read them think that the Old Testament reveals a terrible, punishing God and the New Testament a tender forgiving one. The utter falsity of this will have been shown by other contributors to this number. Both aspects of God are taught in both Testaments. This truth we find uncomfortable.

A few days ago I was in the home of two teachers and by way of an opening gambit to an after-dinner conversation said, 'I don't think that a thoroughly nice person can be a really good teacher'. There was a silence. I had dropped two clangers. I had offered my hosts the choice between judging themselves to be inferior teachers or less than 'thoroughly nice' as people. But that was not the whole of my mistake. They were rather disedified that a priest should by implication praise the condition of not being thoroughly nice. I made everything worse when I went on to say that a good teacher must be able to be quite offensive. This suggestion was entirely unacceptable. One should never be offensive.

Admittedly it seems beyond dispute that a conscientious christian should never be offensive. And yet the language of the scriptures is often very offensive. I have often thought that a good subject for a scriptural thesis would be 'The art of vituperation in the Old and New Testaments'. The tongues of the messengers of God had a real cutting edge. Sorry! Two. The word of God is something alive and active: it cuts like any double-edged sword but more finely . . .'[1] And this is not confined to Jeremiah and St Paul on their off-days. Page after page of the gospel show Christ in angry dispute and wield-

[1] Heb 4, 12.

ing a very bitter tongue against the scribes and pharisees, turning it on the unbelieving mass of his hearers and sometimes using it on the apostles. I have no doubt that Christ was not 'thoroughly nice'. He gave offence all round the wicket. We find 'gentle Jesus' in the gospel only by ignoring most of the gospel story. Christ threatens, denounces and derides. He gave such great offence that the congregation of Nazareth synagogue wanted to lynch him; the citizens of Jerusalem tried to stone him; and the more smoothly operating political bosses decided to discredit him, and remove him, and did. When Christ spoke his mind, people wanted, quite literally, to murder him.

Having satisfactorily won my argument with my friends, a fortnight later, on paper and in their absence, I turn elsewhere. I turn to that fount of wisdom, inexhaustible to the reflective man, the conduct of small children. Small children have a great power of loving. It may on analysis be a self-centred love, but they love strenuously. And they have a wondrous capacity for rage. Whenever I see a frustrated child I am heartily glad that it is small. If its vehement passion disposed of the strength of a grown person it would wreck the house. 'Of such is the kingdom of heaven'. I am being less than fair. When Christ made that statement he was not canonizing anything childish, certainly not childish tantrums. But people often cherish a false sentimental picture of childhood and its pretty ways. The falsity is akin to that of the sentimental conception of the 'good and gentle' Jesus. And I think that the kinship of the falsity is itself instructive.

I call another witness, the mother. Is there any word so evocative of gentleness and tenderness as 'motherhood'? But how does a mother behave to anything or anyone that threatens to hurt her child? Her hostility is prompt, fierce and implacable. The stronger her love, the fiercer her reaction. Indeed, her hostility is her love arrayed in posture of defence. It is arrayed in defence, but it may well pass over to the offensive. Her love for her child is redeployed in the form of active hostility. Does not every love have a similar form of redeployment in parallel circumstances? Do you not take your life into your hands if you speak slightingly to a man of his mother, to a patriot of his country, to a Glasgow catholic of the Celtic? Even a person who passionately believes in tolerance finds intolerance intolerable. Is it not logical to conclude that a part of loving is the capacity to hate?

Is not love a sensitivity? And a sensitivity produces contrary

reactions to contrary stimuli. The trained palate will be exhilarated by a rare vintage and will choke on grocer's port. The uninitiate will down both indifferently. The trained musical ear will be delighted by a good musical performance and affronted by a bad one, while the unmusical are bored by both. It is important to remember that when we heighten people's capacity to enjoy we also increase their capacity to be irritated and nauseated. When you educate someone you do not necessarily make his life happier. Perhaps the contrary. Teach someone a sensitive appreciation of the good, the true and the beautiful, and he may suffer greatly from ugliness, falsity and evil. When he does, should he patiently, resignedly swallow the bitter draught? Or should he expectorate?

The body will protect itself quite violently. Vomiting and diarrhoea are salutary reactions to the presence of poison. Should not the healthy spirit have its own analogous revulsions? It does. It hates. We commonly think of vomiting as a sign of ill-health and in this we are both right and wrong. If we cannot keep down food, we die. If we fail to throw up poison, we also die. It is of vital importance that we vomit with discrimination. And we must hate with discrimination. But we must also be able to hate promptly and vigorously whatever is poison to the spirit. Otherwise the spirit dies, or is at least debilitated.

The body is better protected than the spirit. Normally there goes into the belly only what we deliberately put into our mouths. But the spirit is open to everything that impinges on it, to all that we see, hear, have suggested to us by other people or the dark promptings of our own lubricious Id. The spirit is always having to protect itself by the reflex of rejection. So, whereas the body needs to vomit only on the odd, regrettable occasion when we have inadvertently swallowed something noxious, the spirit needs to preserve itself by hating constantly.

Perhaps the reader is tempted to switch on his rejection reflex by my warm, unequivocal recommendation of hate. Yet the notion is quite acceptable in certain contexts. It is a tribute to a craftsman to say that he hates shoddy workmanship, to a scholar to say that he hates avoidable inaccuracy. We praise a sincere man by saying that he hates cant, a social reformer by saying that he hates injustice. In all these contexts the power to hate, indeed the exercise of hatred, is a constituent part of the relevant virtue. If hate is part of being a good scholar or a good artisan, why not part of being a good christian?

I hate nationalism. I hate it because it is founded upon grossly

false myths. There is a false assumption that mankind is divided into separate nations as plainly, as distinctly as the animal kingdom is divided into species. The geographical myth pretends that the earth is divided into distinct regions, one of which is somehow divinely apportioned to each nation as its 'sacred soil', even if it includes a lot of barren rock. The linguistic myth selects a certain stage of the national tongue – which may be a wretched provincial dialect we would do well to forget – and makes it into 'classical X-ish': classical X-ish which must be drummed into the children and used on all official occasions. Other languages are 'foreign' languages. The historical myth selects some portion of the national past, exaggerates its achievements, paints over its black patches, sprinkles false glister all over, and thus is produced the 'golden age' of X-land, when X-men had the stature which is rightly theirs.

But nationalism is not only palpably false, it is also morally vicious. It gratifies self-assertiveness. Most of us have so little to pride ourselves on that even the most frenzied wishful thinking provides inadequate grounds for boasting and complacency. But we can easily be persuaded to a vicarious satisfaction in the past glories of X-land and a strident assertion of its superiority and its 'rights'. Hubris used to be a sin to which only those of heroic mould could be tempted. Now nationalism puts a shoddy second-hand hubris within the reach of the man in the street and he normally grabs at it. Christ saved the world by 'emptying himself'. Every christian must save his soul by a parallel process. Humility is an inadequate word for what must be not only an attitude, but an activity of self-stripping. Hubris is its extreme contrary. Nationalism, the poor man's hubris, is a spiritual disease.

Nationalism is viciously divisive. It emphasizes separateness. It preserves, heightens and sometimes creates, political, cultural, linguistic and economic barriers. It is perhaps the principal ingredient in the concoction of war. It is the stock-in-trade of dictators and demagogues. It is perhaps the worst form of the vice that it successfully masquerades as a virtue. A nationalist deludes himself that he is serving a noble cause, fulfilling a sacred duty. It is a false religion with its own rituals, martyrs and canonizations. It invests with a pseudo-holiness 'the soil of our country', 'our national heritage', 'our mother tongue' and other cultic fetishes.

The most fearsome aspect of nationalism to me, is that education and religion seem powerless against it. Education seems to breed it. It has far more appeal to the university student than to the subsist-

ence farmer. It is the intelligentsia, not the proles, who revive dying languages. It is the teacher rather than the parent who pumps nationalism into the child. The University of Louvain is perhaps the most respected catholic institution of its kind in the world. In recent years it has been shaken from stem to stern by nationalist agitation. Neither learning nor catholicism seem to have had the slightest prophylactic effect against the virus of nationalism, either at Louvain or elsewhere. I have met so many intelligent priests and religious in whom the older human passions were plainly tamed: they were disciplined, unselfish, dutiful, austere. But the slightest stimulation revealed the untamed passion of nationalism.

I have gone on about nationalism at this length, not to indulge my distaste for it, but to show in detail an example of something a christian may rightly hate, something which he ought to hate, something which he ought to counter with detestation, denunciation and derision. 'Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God with the love of thy whole heart, and thy whole soul, and thy whole strength and thy whole mind'. Logically and psychologically the inevitable corollary is that we should detest evil, and detest it with the same wholehearted commitment. A real love of God entails a loathing for evil, a real hatred for ruthless self-worship, for unscrupulous acquisitiveness, callous sensuality, gross materialism, irrational violence, and supine non-commitment. Or, if you prefer seven brief categories to my periphrastic six; pride, covetousness, lust . . .

The time has come, and is perhaps overdue, when I should define 'hate', or like Humpty Dumpty say what work I want it to do. Love and hate, as my pupils have pointed out to me, are akin and therefore have common features. The first is appreciation. In love there is an intuition of the value of a person. A clear minded woman sees fairly plainly the shortcomings of her child. But the child is still inexpressibly important to her. And her evaluation is objective. The rest of us who see only a rather plain, not very endearing, unremarkable, average infant, are wrong. The precious, inestimable core, the *haecceitas* escapes us. The mother intuitively grasps it. The lover arrives at the vision of it. God has always known it. Appreciation naturally produces concern, a solicitude to protect and foster. We serve those we really love, and the service is its own satisfaction and gratification. But love does ask something. It asks for contact and communication. It wants intimacy.

Hate, I suggest, begins with the appreciation of, an evaluation of the evil of something. Love, having glimpsed the preciousness of

its object, is concerned to foster it. Hate having judged the evil of its object, is concerned, to frustrate, to reduce, destroy it. Love seeks intimacy. Hate cannot sufficiently dissociate itself from what it hates.

We spontaneously think, dare I say we unthinkingly think, love to be a good thing, and hate to be bad. Love and hate are forces. They can be directed or misdirected. Hate, as I have described it – the appreciation of evil producing the vehement rejection of it and the passionate concern to destroy it – is manifestly on the side of the angels. We cannot be sound and vigorous christians without the sound and vigorous exercise of hate. First of all we need to exercise hate on ourselves. We need to see all the self-assertiveness, the callousness, the self-indulgence which is at work in ourselves, appreciate the actual evil and potential for much greater evil that this represents and then, yearn earnestly and work unremittingly for its destruction.

And what of other people? Here is the rub. The christian must love everyone, must he not, or at least be trying to? A good christian behaves well to everyone, speaks well of everyone, tries to think well of everyone. Does he? Or should we close our eyes to evil, not talk about it, try not to think about it, and hope that it may go away? Should we sit like well-bred guests at the tea table of life, politely pretending not to see what shouldn't be there, valiantly smoothing over all awkwardnesses with a bland discharge of inoffensive chatter.

But 'Have you strength to drink of the cup I am to drink of'? was not an invitation to tea. The salt of the earth is not meant to be a sugar coating. A two-edged sword is not for scratching backs. 'I have come to bring a sword, not peace' is no formula for cosy coexistence.

There is a well worn axiom 'Hate the sin and love the sinner'. But it is not as simple as all that. Christ did not register a reluctant disapproval of certain facets of phariseeism. He excoriated the pharisees. Peter and Paul do not find themselves forced to regret that certain contemporary teachings were open to possible misinterpretation. They savage the false teachers.

I do not think that we can disregard these examples on the ground that the hebrew mind worked concretely, that the distinction between condemning the deed and censuring the doer would have been too sophisticated for this primitive form of teaching. I think that the distinction is a bit over sophisticated for us. To condemn an act of brutality and abstain from condemning the brute makes no sense. It is to treat all brutality as a regrettable accident. The difference between George getting a black eye from an accidental knock

of John's elbow and his getting one from a deliberate blow of John's fist is exactly in the deliberation, in John's responsibility, in John's culpability, in his blameworthiness. George's black eye comes from John's vicious decision to hit him, a decision springing from John's brutal, callous attitude of mind. We must condemn that decision and the mind behind the decision. Is it realistic to condemn John's decision and John's attitude, but not to condemn John? You may dislike John's haircut without disliking John, but you cannot distinguish so blithely between John's character and John.

John's counsel might quote, 'Do not judge others' and 'Whichever of you is free from sin shall cast the first stone'. These constitute a formidable plea. In the role of prosecutor I would reply that Christ did a good deal of purposeful, verbal stonethrowing. Defence: 'But he was free from sin'. Prosecution: 'Christ condemned as part of his mission, his mission to deliver men from evil. He had to point it out, to denounce it'. His mission was then confided to the Church, which is why the apostles' letters contain so many denunciations. The fight against evil is committed to the whole Church, to every christian. It is the first necessity of fighting that you identify your enemy and ascertain his whereabouts and his strength. We cannot fight evil unless we recognize it, and having recognized it repudiate it intellectually and emotionally.

The persevering reader may have come to the conclusion by now that I wish to inaugurate a new space age phariseeism with the christian radiating hostility like a Dalek, relentlessly searching for his enemy and switching on his hate gun, 'exterminate, exterminate...' Since I may have given some grounds for this misconception, let me remove them. First as to pharisaism. The typical pharisee saw himself as standing apart. The word itself may mean 'separated one'. He was one of the chosen people and he belonged to its zealous, observant elite. Standing apart and raised on an eminence of conscious rectitude, he condemned the ignorant masses, the publican, the gentile. The christian sees himself as always involved, hopefully involved, with everyone else. 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'. As thyself. I may not hate myself. I may, I must, loathe my own vices and weaknesses. But the ultimate I, the core of my being, is a piece of territory which I must win for the kingdom of God. It is the primary objective of my christian struggle. I must be ready to die to win it. Certainly I must not despise it.

Since I must look at other people in the light of these same truths as I look at myself, my attitude to others must parallel my attitude

to myself. I may despise myself for many things. But I must endeavour everything for my salvation. I must endeavour all I can for the salvation of my neighbour. And I must hate his vices because of what they are doing to him and to all of us, as I must hate my own because of what they do to all of us and me. It is this awareness of solidarity in sin which frees us from pharisaism. We do not condemn others from the judge's seat; we admit them to share the dock with us. We do not diagnose their sickness as if we were healthy medical officials; we let them join us in the ranks of the plague-stricken.

I have referred so often to the emotions that I may appear to want to generate some sort of moral frenzy. Frenzy, no. Passion, yes. There is a real difference. The chief effect of a woman's love for her family is her unwearying (she herself gets weary, but not her love) care for their needs, not wild demonstrations of affection. A scholar's hatred of inaccuracy shows itself in painstaking vigilance to avoid error, not in outbursts against it. Our hostility to evil should in normal circumstances resemble the work of a conscientious medical officer of health against disease, always alert against new outbreaks, trying to contain it, to reduce its incidence, to eliminate it. He does not conduct his campaign for public health with histrionics.

Life should not be lived in a fine frenzy. But it is also incomplete without its periods of intensity. There is a time to take the box of precious ointment and pour out its whole contents in one lavish gesture of love. There is a time to take small cords and knot them into a whip with which to cleanse the temple.

'O pale galilean, the world has grown grey with thy breath'. O pale pervert of a poet! I do not know the colour of the wine of Cana, but I am sure it was not grey. The gospel is full of the glow of life; the sick are cured; the dead rise; its pages are aflame with love and sometimes ablaze with anger. But perhaps Swinburne had a point. He diagnosed the anaemic condition of our christianity. We achieve a tepid goodwill to mankind at large and no one in particular and dub it charity. We are careful to offend no one, lest they dislike us, and give ourselves credit for tolerance. 'Being what thou art, lukewarm, neither cold, nor hot, thou wilt make me vomit thee out of my mouth'.[1] Shall I say it differently? We neither hate nor really love, and therefore God finds us flat, stale and unpalatable. He told us to love. I am suggesting strongly that this means that we must also hate. Thou shalt hate thy neighbour as thyself, for God's sake. Q.E.D.?

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[1] Apoc 3, 15.