THE COMPASSIONATE HEART

By JOHN ASHTON

In nature there's no blemish but the mind;
None can be called deformed but the unkind.
(Twelfth Night)

THERE IS A good case to be made out for the contention that kindness is the most central of the christian virtues, the one that gives us the best vantage point upon the mystery of the Incarnation and illuminates for us the methods and principles of what the fathers called the economy of salvation. Unlike love, which few can command, and unlike pity, which is frequently remote and condescending, kindness is rooted in that natural affinity which belongs to men by virtue of their humanity; and what is more, it never hurts or diminishes those who are touched by its benefits and its graces. Charity can be exercized unfeelingly (how often is one told, amazingly, of the irrelevance of feelings in religious practice), and besides kindness, only sympathy, that characteristically pauline term, and perhaps gentleness, carries that suggestion of affectionate understanding that we want to be able to attribute to God by reason of the Incarnation. Kindness, gentleness and sympathy are, of course, closely related, but it is of kindness, which used to appear among the twelve fruits of the holy Ghost under the quaint pseudonym of 'benignity', that I want to speak first.

The use Shakespeare makes of the word 'kind' is highly instructive, because when he was writing its moral implications had not yet fully detached themselves from the ontological: 'Timon will be to the woods, where he shall find the unkindest beast more kinder than mankind'. The dramatist plays upon the original meaning of kind ('native', 'implanted by nature', 'belonging to this particular kind or species') in order to underline the bitterness of Timon's plight, deserted as he was by his own kind and forced to turn instead to the ordinarily hostile world of brute creation. Nowhere is the tension between noun and adjective more fruitfully exploited

than in *The Merchant of Venice*, when Shylock, though his humanity is still not fully acknowledged by those he hates, is praised for his 'kindness' by Antonio. The 'gentle Jew' turns out to be less kind than he at first appeared, but it is plain to the audience at least that his malice is a direct consequence of his sense of exclusion from the human race. A similar feeling, of course, underlies the present frustration and fury of the coloured races, who are denied membership of the great white family of man simply because of the pigmentation of their skin. (And although most of the prejudice felt against the negro in particular has its source in ignorance or upbringing, there may be an irreducible percentage which is basically a crude and instinctive reaction of hostility and fear. And such prejudice in the hardest of all to overcome.)

Yet kindness was originally the most 'natural' of human qualities, arising out of the sense of kinship which united humanity in a world still small enough to be encompassed in a single thought. The qualities of generosity and gentleness (linked, incidentally, to *genus* and *gens* and, more remotely, to 'kind' and 'kind') were felt to belong to the noblest and best, the 'kindest', in one of the word's secondary senses, of men. Such a man was Othello, until jealousy overcame his natural kindness and blocked his generosity and his love. But despite the comparative rarity of true kindness in Shakespeare's world, the ethical and ontological meanings of the word were both sufficiently present and sufficiently connected to allow him to ironize on the failure of human kind to live up to its name and show itself properly humane.[1] But the kindness we are concerned with a is *natural* virtue in the sense that it has its roots in the affinity of the members of the human race. *Because* we are human, subject to the same doubt and desires, the same fears and the same strivings, we can, if we allow ourselves, be kind to one another. Where does the secret of this kindness lie?

Basically, no doubt, in the instinctive attraction felt by members of the same species towards one another, though in the case of mankind this attraction is sometimes increased and sometimes attenuated by factors like nationality, race and social background. Few are those who can claim, with St Paul, to have become 'all things to all men',[2] and for some the circle within which their sympathy is allowed to stretch and exercize itself may be very

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[1] Horowitz, D.: *Shakespeare: an Existential View* (London, 1965), p. 118.
[2] 1 Cor 9, 22.

restricted indeed. But utter selfishness is also rare, and is found, if at all, only in the man so much at the mercy of his own ambitions, feelings and anxieties that he is unable to reach out beyond the walls of his own ego. *L'enfer, c'est les autres* (Hell is other people), announces one of the characters in Sartre's *Huis Clos*; but the play itself offers a completely different reading, that *l'enfer, c'est soi-même* (Hell is oneself). To use another person, as a crutch, a mirror, as an instrument of pleasure or self-torture, is to exclude all love except possibly the *amor concupiscentiae* (which continues, however, because of the complexity of this emotion, to lay some claim to the name of love).[3] And to look to others simply and solely for assistance and entertainment is the negation of that sensitive respect for all human beings which is one of the marks of true kindness.

As bad as using other people, treating them as means rather than as ends (the cardinal sin in the kantian calendar) is the loveless understanding which accompanies such a use. It is a terrible, a frightening thing, to be known, intimately and profoundly, by another person, and when such knowledge is not softened by love it is quite intolerable. Human pride rightly revolts against the sort of cold and analytic comprehension exhibited, say, by Shakespeare's Iago. Yet Iago, for all his insight into the characters of Othello and Cassio, for all the sly shrewdness with which he plays upon their weaknesses, stops short of total understanding precisely because his understanding is loveless: it hovers uneasily outside the real Othello, and we feel that Desdemona, despite her obliviousness to the growth of Othello's jealousy, knows and understands him in a way that Iago never will. Even so, Iago, obsessed by the urge to get inside others and to manipulate the tumblers of their minds, goes as far as any villain in literature in the direction of a satanic comprehension.

The same idea is expressed in the bible by the symbolic link between shame and nakedness. From the story of the disgrace of Adam and Eve, through that of Noah's drunkenness, right up to the account of our Lord's crucifixion (where his stripping – omitted by St John for that reason – was felt as the ultimate ignominy), nakedness meant primarily the exposure of the human body to a

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[3] St Thomas (ST 1^a 2^{ae}, q. 26, art. 4) divides love up into *amor amicitiae*, a selfless longing for the welfare of the loved one, and *amor concupiscentiae*, which could almost be translated 'cupboard love': the other person is viewed primarily as a means of one's own gratification. Jealousy, for St Thomas, is an indication of *amor concupiscentiae*; but he did seem to envisage the possibility of a love free from the slightest tinge of selfishness, rather naively, we might be tempted to think.

gaze wanting in love and respect. Unless accompanied by love, any really intimate knowledge of another person (body or soul, it was all one) was felt as an intolerable intrusion – so much so that the verb 'to know' was frequently used of the act of love itself. Nowadays most of us may find jewish sensitivity on this point hard to understand, living as we do in an age that proliferates with surveys and inquiries packed with astonishingly detailed questions concerning areas of human behaviour which used to be confined to the bedroom or some other discreet spot. The extraordinary complacency with which ordinary people allow total strangers to probe into the intimate recesses of their lives will surely come to be regarded as one of the craziest aberrations of twentieth-century western man. Any professional pryer is readily admitted into the holiest of inner sanctums provided he can brandish a questionnaire composed with the right blend of impudence (in the full sense of the word – wanting in *pudeur*) and white-coated clinical disinterestedness.[4] However, there may still be a handful of people around who place sufficient value upon delicacy and modesty to demand some assurance of love or at least of affection before they are prepared to divest themselves of whatever flimsy rags they have been able to piece together over the years to protect their secret selves from the public eye. And such people, if they feel the need to be understood – and which of us does not? – will not turn to the sociologist or the psychologist or the sexologist, or even, for that matter, to the moral theologian, but to a sympathic friend. For sympathy implies affection as well as understanding.

Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt
Weiss was ich leide.[5]

(Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*)

What is sympathy? Etymologically a suffering-with, it depends upon our ability to identify ourselves with another person, not in the sense of becoming totally one with him – this is the aim of lovers and has nothing to do with ordinary pity or kindness – but in the sense of responding to his sorrow, joy, fear or distress, with

[4] We have a lot to learn from Anna Karenina's little boy: 'He was nine years old; he was a child; but he knew his own soul and treasured it, guarding it as the eyelid guards the eye, and without the key of love he let no one into his heart'.

[5] 'Only someone who has experienced yearning can know what I suffer'.

affection and understanding. The response must be direct and personal, so mere benevolence (kindliness) is not enough; but except in rare cases of emotional exaltation or ecstasy, no one can literally enter into another person's feelings, and if in order to communicate with someone else we had to step outside ourselves and assume another set of responses, then dialogue would still be impossible, for there would now be not two persons but one.[6] And if suffering really were infectious, then we would still not have the grounds for true sympathy, since the object of my pity would now be – or tend to be – not the suffering of others, but my own. Criticizing Schopenhauer's theory of the revelation, through pity *(Mitleid)*, of my metaphysical unity with others, Scheler remarks that such a unitary identity of existence as the theory demands, with its reduction of individual suffering to mere illusion, would make it quite inconceivable how pity *for* another person, and the acts of succour so engendered, could have any special moral value: 'The dissolution of the self in a common stockpot of misery eliminates *genuine* pity altogether'.

Nor can one demand, for true comprehension, that the other person should have experienced, in his own regard, the same emotion in precisely the same degree as the one he is being asked to understand. The murderous couple in *Macbeth*, for instance, are understood from the inside, yet the temptation, the fear, the excitement and the remorse are projected by the author's imaginative vision, playing no doubt upon recollected emotions of a parallel order, but admirable rather for its power to transform than for its capacity to reproduce. And yet true understanding must surely be grounded upon *some* experience; Goethe's Mignon cannot be totally wrong: the experience of *some* sorrow, even if it is not precisely that characteristically romantic nostalgia the germans call *Sehnsucht*, is obviously a pre-condition of the sympathy she seeks. Once again the lesson is in Shakespeare, this time in *King Lear*, in the terrible scene of Gloucester's attempted suicide. Edgar's behaviour, in systematically frustrating the old man's efforts whilst pretending to abet them, would be callous in the extreme were it not for the depth of his compassion. Eventually the bewildered Gloucester asks him point-blank; 'Now good sir, what are you?', and Edgar replies,

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[6] So Max Scheler, in his brilliant and profound book, *The Nature and Forms of Sympathy*, is right to distinguish *Einsfühlung*, emotional identification, which involves the absorption of one person's personality into another, from *Mitgefühl*, fellow-feeling, where there is an intentional reference of one's own joy or sorrow to the joy or sorrow of another.

> A most poor man, made tame to fortune's blows,
> Who by the art of known and feeling sorrows
> Am pregnant to good pity.

Edgar's own sorrows make him responsive to Gloucester's plight, and he implies that without them he would not have been visited by pity at all. And it is the very same emotion of pity that Shakespeare, thereby exhibiting the extent and sensitivity of his own compassion,[7] appeals to in his audience. What is it that makes possible this curious complicity of author, actors and audience that is so marked a feature of a great or even a good performance of a great or even a good play? Once again, it is their common humanity, elevated and sometimes ennobled by one man's genius.

There is much to learn from creative writers about what Scheler calls 'the nature and forms of sympathy', not least from those who, for one fascinating reason or another, fail to reach the heights of a Shakespeare or a Tolstoy. We can learn from Proust, for instance, setting out upon the search for time past, as he deliberately moulds his memories into patterns of his own choosing, intending thereby to control and, ultimately, to possess them; for this urge to dominate and own the characters in his book marks, in the last analysis, a failure in love. Proust held that the aim of all love was total possession and that jealousy, reaching even into the other's past, was its inseparable adjunct: *amor concupiscentiae* was the only love he knew or at any rate acknowledged. His practice as a writer accorded with this theory and his insight into his characters, though unquestionably brilliant and penetrating, was seldom merciful – the winning and gentle figure of the narrator's grandmother and just possibly the doomed and dying Swann are the only exceptions I can recall.

Inheriting from his powerful predecessors – Stendahl, Balzac and Flaubert – the technique of the all-seeing consciousness, Proust sounds at the same time the loudest warning of the dangers of a loveless understanding. *Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner* (to understand everything is to forgive everything) may be an unreliable romantic maxim, but it does at least suggest that to be short of forgiveness can indicate a failure to comprehend. The greatest imaginative writers, Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Chaucer, James, Stendahl, love their characters, even if discerningly, and they are able to do so because of their own humanity. On the other hand,

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[7] Helen Gardner, in a rather different connection, observes that 'pity is to Shakespeare the strongest and profoundest of human emotions, the distinctively human emotion'. *The Business of Criticism* (Oxford, 1959), p 60.

Lawrence's greatest weakness as a creative writer lies in the very restricted range of his love, and therefore of his understanding. The full-blooded and the impetuous seize his sympathy and fire his imagination: the cautious, the prudent and the weak among his characters cringe under the disdain of their creator.

So there are at least two lessons to be learnt here. The first is that the moral imagination required for the creation of rounded human characters must arise out of but extend beyond the author's personal experience of himself as subject and probably beyond the range of his spontaneous affinities. He must learn to know and to sympathize with the non-self as well as the self. And the second lesson is that the inability to sympathize with any except those of a similar temperament and disposition to himself curiously diminishes a writer's range, and renders his work blotchy and uneven. We can only love what we know and, where people are concerned, whether real or fictitious, we can only know what we love.

The lesson of the Incarnation is no other. Christ came to share our humanity not in order that we should sympathize with him (this is where the modern devotion to the Sacred Heart has got things tangled up) but so that he could sympathize with us. The driving force of the dogmatic development of the first few centuries may be summed up in two very simple principles: had Christ not been God, he could not have saved mankind; had he not been man he would not in fact have done so. The second of these principles, which concerns the effective realization of God's redemptive plan, is the mainspring of all the early christological dogmas. Gregory of Nazianzen put it negatively in a well-known axiom: 'what is not assumed is not saved'. Had Christ's soul not been fully human in all its 'parts', so ran his argument against Apollinarius, man would not have been fully redeemed. Every part of the human soul, including the spiritual or 'intellectual' part, was involved in the fall, so every part must have been included in the redemption. But the archaic language in which these ancient arguments were couched should not blind us to their importance. To say that the Son of God fully 'assumed' our human nature may seem an excessively roundabout way of affirming that he was truly man, but in the rarefied atmosphere of fourth-century theological debate such detours were not only intelligible but necessary if the challenge of the great heresies was to be fairly met.

No longer speaking the language of the fathers of Constantinople and Chalcedon, we who inherit their faith must discover alternative

ways of expressing it. Whilst no longer interested in the affirmation that the Son of God must have 'assumed' a fully rational human soul, we might still be anxious to assert that God must have made himself fully available to man, that his kindness must have been more than a condescending pity. Present day christology must return, surely, to the inspiration of the letter to the hebrews: 'He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness';[8] 'For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted'.[9] A priest first and a human being afterwards? Not, at any rate, for this author, for whom Christ's humanity was an essential element in his priesthood.

The Creator-God, who made us in his own image, must by that very fact have a total understanding of who and what we are. And love, the theologians bewilderingly inform us, was his motive for creating. But the evidence of relevation is that he realized the inadequacy of this love and this understanding. He needed to express his love in human terms: the word of his love and understanding had to take flesh.

> *Now that my ladder's gone,*
> *I must lie down where all the ladders start,*
> *In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.*
>
> (W. B. Yeats, *The Circus Animals' Desertion*)

From the critic, as well as the creative writer, we have much to learn. F. R. Leavis, by common consent one of the greatest of modern critics, defines his role as one of 'entering into possession of a given poem (let us say) in its concrete fulness'. He uses the word 'possession', unconciously arrogant. But the response of the critic to a work of art should not be the desire to own and engulf it. It would no doubt be unfair to Leavis to overstress the importance of a single word (though, following Henry James, he uses the model of acquisition more than once in his attempts to describe the work of the critic). A better starting-point would be another phrase from *Education and the University*: 'What we call analysis is, of course, a constructive or creative process. It is a more deliberate following through of that process of creation in response to the poet's words which reading is. It is a re-creation, in which, by a considering attentiveness, we ensure a more than ordinary faithfulness and completeness'.

[8] Heb 5, 2. [9] Heb 2, 18.

That reading, and not merely writing, is a process of creation may be an unfamiliar thought to most of us. But a poem does not exist in isolation from its readers any more than a speaker exists in isolation from his listeners. By our reading we help to create the poem *as* a poem; by our listening we justify the appellation 'speaker'. And if speech is the human faculty that sets man above the beasts, he is rendered human by his listeners – by other men. A baby needs to be assured of a real response to his as yet incoherent cries if he is going to take the risk later of plunging into articulate speech. Later still, he will build his personality upon the reactions of others to his words and actions; he will learn to know himself largely from his own reaction of affection and dislike, anger and desire, admiration and contempt, to the behaviour of those whom he meets. No man is an island. Personality is anchored by relationships, past and present.

Within such relationships, the 'considering attentiveness', or what Leavis calls elsewhere in the same context the 'discipline in scrupulous sensitiveness of response to delicate organizations of feeling, sensation and imagery', is the greatest compliment one human being can pay to another short of unreserved love. It entails the refusal to classify and categorize, the deliberate attempt to respond to what is not said as well as to what is said. To classify is to dismiss, whatever the classification may be: hippies or squares, bourgeois or drop-outs. Yet such is our apparent reluctance to take each individual on his own terms that until we have succeeded in 'placing' a person to our own satisfaction we remain uneasy. Like a man who prides himself on his ability to spot local accents, we constantly seek to lodge a new acquaintance in our private pigeon-hole system.

One reason why Jesus' contemporaries found him so tiresome was that they felt unable to dismiss him in this way. He frequented the company of tax-collectors and prostitutes and it would have been nice to be able to range him, as they sometimes tried to do, among the gluttons and the drunkards;[10] but he resisted such easy classification. He himself remained indifferent to all the accepted social categories: this is what the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, the central document of the christian ethic, is all about. The barrier separating these two men, erected by the establishment according to establishment categories, was morally irrelevant. The categories of society are invalid. Of course no one would dream nowadays of applying the word 'sinner' to a whole class of people. Perhaps this

[10] Cf Lk 7, 34.

much of Jesus' lesson has been learnt, that the only man with a right to place a person among the ranks of the 'sinners' is that person himself. But demarcation lines of various sorts continue to be drawn, and the rejection they imply, though less explicit, is just as firm. Jesus, the good Shepherd, knows his sheep by name, whether they belong to his fold or not: even *this* demarcation line, which we cannot completely dispense with if there is to be a visible Church at all, is of no lasting significance in the eyes of God.

Besides the tendency to dismiss by classifying there are two further tendencies which, by shackling the intelligence and muffling the sensibility, limit understanding and impede communication. The first is more the consequence of temperament and inclination than of upbringing. Psychologists speak of introvert and extrovert: easy categories, no doubt, which cannot in themselves be expected to cover more than a few of the varied and shifting shades of attitude and response which most people come to recognize, at least in others, rapidly and instinctively. And one may well hesitate to adopt whole-heartedly any of the multifarious dualistic systems which have been used to impose an intelligible order upon both cosmos and psyche as far back as we can trace in the history of human thought. Within recent years Teilhard has taught us to distinguish between radial and tangential energy, Lonergan between the operating component and the integrating component. Such polarities may no more compel our assent than the chinese *Yin* and *Yang* or the jungian *animus* and *anima*; and in any case none of them is sufficiently flexible or discerning to cover the splendidly dense and opaque area of human motivation and behaviour.

Nevertheless, that there are warring tendencies within the human psyche, and that these can manifest themselves in conflicts between private propensities and public policies has been acknowledged since Plato. And it would be foolish to deny a certain natural tension between the ideals of advance and those of consolidation, or between the values of the progressive and those of the conservative, distasteful as these labels may be to those who feel that their own position is too subtle and too personal to be adequately summed up by such coarse and undiscriminating tags. 'Things thought too long can be no longer thought', says Yeats, and the words may be taken as a warning against the premature hardening of the mental arteries that is found, alas, almost as often in the young as in the old. Lionel Trilling, in a lecture published nine years ago, regrets the facile and uncritical receptivity of his students towards anything

presented to them as an idea, and speaks of progressive and conservative pieties, 'if any of the latter do still exist'.[11] There is no shortage of them in this country, Mr. Trilling.

The point I want to make here is this: whatever our own bent may be, progressive or conservative, protestant or catholic (and there are, thank God, many natural 'protestants' within the catholic Church), we must be prepared to listen to and to learn from those with whom we have little instinctive sympathy. If dialogue is to mean anything it must be carried on between those who disagree as well as between those who agree. If we were all a little more aware that our own values and preferences are not totally reasoned we might be more ready to make allowances for those who think and respond differently.

There is another dangerous tendency (also, in its way, a tendency to classify and categorize) which clutters the road to understanding: and this is a besetting temptation of all who live according to an ideology, be it marxist, fascist or christian. (Not that christianity, rightly conceived, should function as an ideology. But that it frequently does so is a fact too obvious to require further elaboration.) This tendency too has its parallel in literary criticism. Dr. Johnson, in his *Life of Pope*, castigates 'the cant of those who judge by principles rather than by perception'. For principles can cramp and confine the sympathetic imagination until all its living personal responsiveness is effectively strait-jacketed, if not choked to death. This is what Muriel Spark has to say about Barbara Vaughan, the central character of *The Mandelbaum Gate* (note once again the use of literary parallels):

> By constitution of mind she was inclined to think of 'a Catholic point of view' to which not all facts were relevant, just as, in her thesis-writing days, she had selected the points of a poem which were related to the thesis. This did not mean that she had failed to grasp the christian religion with a total sense of its universal application, or that she was unable to recognize, in one simple process, the virtue of a poem. All it meant was that her habits of mind were inadequate to cope with the whole of her experience.

This inadequacy was exemplified in the course of a love-affair with a divorced man:

> She was obliged to repent. What of – the love-affair? No, adultery, to be precise. Yes, but to be precise, it was impossible to distinguish the formal expression of her love from the emotion.

[11] 'On the teaching of modern literature', in *Beyond Culture* (London, 1967).

And 'it is impossible to repent of love. The sin of love does not exist'. So it was that her experience came into conflict with her 'habits of mind', her principles. Eventually, she decides to marry Harry Clegg, come what may:

> The only point at issue is whether we can get married by the Church or not, that's to say, whether I'm going to have peace of mind for the rest of my life or not.

For her peace of mind is evidently very much bound up with her habits of mind.

The catholic child, like the convert Barbara Vaughan, is taught what to think of certain types of conduct. The sins he can commit are grouped, marshalled and delineated for him long before he is able to grasp what they entail in terms of human experience. He is even told what God thinks about them: 'mortal sins' cut you off completely from God, while 'venial sins' do not. So catholic children are furnished at an early age with a kind of moral yardstick which they can use for measuring all posible experience. Sooner or later the day will come, as it did for Barbara Vaughan, when they are faced with the kind of intractable, awkwardly-shaped experience that resists all attempts at measurement. At this point several options are open, though the individual may not perceive this at all clearly.

He may in the first place jettison his principles as a useless encumbrance: instead of helping him to live sanely and purposefully, they have been shutting him off, or so he feels, from the world of free and responsible human decision. In the name of life and liberty he bids them adieu. Alternatively he may squeeze and pummel his experience so as to submit it to the canons of behaviour with which he is familiar. The super-ego is too strong to release him. God, when it comes to the crunch, is identified with a moral law whose outlines are comfortingly hard, bony and predictable. Because he is human there is a voice which tells him that he should opt for life and not for legalism, but he stifles this voice and submits. It is safer that way.

In the third place he may behave like Barbara Vaughan, who followed the dictates of her heart without altogether renouncing her allegiance to the rule of law, accepting the inevitable fission within her being sadly but without dissemblance. Or, unlike her, he may purchase peace of mind at the price of happiness, not seeking to deny his experience but sacrificing it to a faith beyond reason wherein, he is obscurely convinced, lies the greater good.

One should hesitate, I think, before producing a quick solution to this kind of moral dilemma; the slicker the solution the less com-

prehensive it is likely to be. And the ability to pronounce any one decision clearly right or wrong may proceed from obtuseness rather than discrimination. If the source of the problem happens to be simply the blanket condemnation of an outmoded legal structure, it may not be impossible to wriggle free. But this is not always the case. Anna Karenina, for instance, chooses love and life (who can blame her?), but her choice eventually immerses her in a deeper selfishness.[12] It is usually possible to insist upon honesty and realism, however hard these are to come by, but the truth may sometimes be so bitter that time is needed to become adjusted to the taste. 'A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench'.[13]

But it is just not possible to clamber up to heaven on the ladder of the law: one may adopt and discard a series of ladders before concluding that Yeats was right: the rag-and-bone shop of the earth is no spacious apartment, but it is surely one where God can feel at home.

To end with the kindness of God is not hard. The great parable of the good Samaritan has furnished christendom with its concept of neighbourliness. Not the priest, not the Levite, fellow-countrymen, but a stranger, a man of different beliefs and different upbringing, who recognized in the beaten body of the man lying half-dead by the road-side a fellow human being. In a society as full of prejudice and mean-spiritedness as our own, the lesson struck home. There is that in each of us which salutes its force and its beauty.

Cutting through the obvious, straightforward meaning of the parable, St Augustine saw in the good Samaritan a figure of Christ. For him, the supreme act of neighbourliness was the Incarnation, which brought the Son of God into a strange country and compelled him to think in unfamiliar ways. He could perhaps have imposed his own upon us – the temptation-narratives suggest that he felt the urge to do so – but he wanted to belong to our race, to be all things to all men, and he did not think of his divinity as a privilege to be exploited. The price for this renunciation was heavy, not fully paid until calvary: 'Let the Christ, the king of Israel, come down from the cross, that we may see and believe'.[14] In such a telling, of course, his story would have lost its truth, and his folly would have lost its wisdom, which is the wisdom of sharing, of accessibility, of human kindness.

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[12] For, *pace* Lawrence, the tragedy of Anna and Vronsky does *not* just come from their fear of society and their refusal to 'spit in Mother Grundy's eye'. F. R. Leavis has some good comments to make on the crudity of Lawrence's criticism in his *Anna Karenina and other Essays* (London, 1967). [13] Mt 12, 20. [14] Mk 15, 32.