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SOME THOUGHTS DURING 'APRIL SHOWERS'

'November Blossoms' and 'April Showers' are peculiarly Udavil conceptions. They are difficult to define, difficult to describe. One might as well attempt to describe the Alpina sunset to one who has not seen it.

It is not my purpose in this article to give a critical appreciation of the performances. I am not competent to do it. What I can say, however, is that as an aesthete I thoroughly enjoyed the evening as did so many others who showered blessings upon Udavil at the end of the programme. I was amazed at the wealth of talent displayed. I recalled to mind other high-lights of by-gone days. I was grateful for Udavil.

As I sat next to a very appreciative friend and exchanged observations with him now and then, several thoughts crowded into my mind. Seeing the spacious grounds and the majestic trees and sensing the character of Udavil, my friend who is not a frequent visitor to Udavil said, "What a blessing, we still have this school". "Yes", I reflected, "Udavil is a national possession. It does not need any nationalisation".

Udavil has played a historic role in the Jaffna scene for nearly a century and a half. In every decade during this long period Udavil has been in the forefront of educational activity. It pioneered in many ways and pushed its educational frontier in several directions. Everything was going on smoothly when in 1960 the take-over came like a bolt from the blue. To surrender would have been the easier course, the line of least resistance. To resist required uncommon courage, faith in God and man and a belief in Udavil's destiny. Udavil chose the narrow path. Seven years have passed by and Udavil stands justified.

But these seven years have been years of blood, toil and sweat. They have also been years of dedication, faith and hope. However, is all this sacrifice worth-while? Don't children in state schools get their education free and without much ado? Do the children at Udavil get something more, something different? A widowed mother, left with very little means in this world, brings up her children lovingly and longingly with prayer and sacrifice. She has great dreams for her little ones. She aids her vast spiritual resources to her meagre material means. Strangely, these prove adequate, though only just adequate. The children grow in stature and wisdom, blessed by God, and become fine young men and women gladdening their mother's heart. There is something in the equipment of such children which makes them outstanding. This indefinable quality is what the present Udavil girl is heir to.

In the days of the 'assisted school' Udavil had become well known for the quality of the public performances it gave periodically. Concerts, dramas and ballets were produced with meticulous care. Hard work and careful planning went into the preparation of these. The results were near professional. The public had learned to expect and receive value for money in the form of refined entertainment. And so once again all roads led to Udavil for 'April Showers'. Old Girls, parents and friends swarmed the campus. They were enthusiastic; they were joyful; they were proud. Their inspiration was Udavil, and Udavil reached a new high.

At Udavil today we see a dramatic demonstration of the invincibility of the human spirit. But in its hallowed history there doubtless were other occasions and other circumstances when the spirit proved triumphant. The Udavil spirit may be defined as the distilled essence of the dedication and sacrifices of many saintly women who laboured there in the name of Christ.

Well may it be said of the Principal and Staff of Udavil in the words of St. Paul that their faith has shown itself in action, their love in labour, and their hope in fortitude.

OUR PLACE TO BE

(A Sermon preached in the Cathedral Church, Vaddukottai recently by Mr. Glenn Yocum).

"And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake; and after the earthquake fire: and the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him, and said, 'What art thou doing here, Elijah?' He said, 'I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the people of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and have worshipped other gods: and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.' And the Lord said, 'I have seen thee, and I have appointed thee to be king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah you shall appoint to be prophet in your place.'" (1 Kings 19:1-16).

To appreciate the tremendous importance of Elijah's experience on Mount Horeb for the biblical view of man's relationship to God we must first see this event in the light of its background. You will remember that Elijah was in conflict with the prophets of the local pagan gods. The situation was especially acute because Jezebel, the wife of King Ahaz, was a worshipper of Baal and was making attempts to propagate her religion in Israel. Thus Israel's faith in the Lord was in danger of being contaminated, and possibly overcome, by the worship of local deities.

To resolve the conflict a great contest was arranged on Mount Carmel between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. We all know the outcome of the contest. Nothing happened when the prophets of Baal called upon their God to consume their sacrifice with fire. But when Elijah called on the Lord to consume the sacrifice made to him, this is what happened: "The fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt offering, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, 'The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God.' And Elijah said to them, 'Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.' And they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and killed them there." (1 Kings 18:38-40).

If we'd stop right there, we'd have a fine story about spectacular religion - about a big contest on Mount Carmel with some real divine fire-works and all the bad guys getting their deserts at the end. And look at the result: "When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said 'The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God.'" And many of us probably think that's just what we need today - a good healthy dose of spectacular religion. Just think what kind of effect an Elijah who could call down fire out of the sky would have today.

But the story doesn't end there. All the spectacular action on Mount Carmel accomplished little indeed, because when Jezebel found out what had happened she did anything but change her mind; rather she vowed to take Elijah's life just as he had killed the prophets of Baal. Elijah's rejection by Queen Jezebel led him to flee into the wilderness. He went to Mount Horeb, which is another name for Mount Sinai, the Mountain of God, where Moses had received the Ten Commandments. There he waited in a cave, expecting God to reveal himself in a spectacular and decisive way as he had done to Moses when the children of Israel were fleeing from Egypt. But no such miracle happened. Instead of a tremendous, over-powering revelation as Elijah and the people had experienced on Mount Carmel, there was now only a still small voice, or, as one of my Old Testament teachers said, a better translation would be "the voice of absolute silence".

No more spectacular religion for Israel - the voice commanded Elijah to leave the mountain, that is, to forget his silly yearnings for grand revelations, and to return to the people and do the job of a prophet of God.

in the events of his time, not fleeing to a religious haven, to Mount Sinai, wishing for repeats of past revelations. Doing what God wanted him to do, and thus to be properly related to God, did not require a flight into the past, but rather participating in what God was doing at that particular moment in man's history. For Elijah the command was to go - and this means away from Mount Sinai, away from his attempt to escape the realities of his time. "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazeel to be king over Syria; and John the son of Nimehi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place" (1 Kings 19:15-16).

This moment marks a great watershed in Israel's history. It is the beginning of the age of the great prophets. It is the end of spectacular religion. The essence of biblical faith becomes being able to discern on the basis of what God has done in the past, primarily on the basis of the Exodus, and for us now as Christians on the basis of the life, death and resurrection of Christ, what God is doing in the present moment in history. Thus, while faith is related to the past, it is just as much related to the here and now, to the moment in time where we find ourselves today. For theology this means, as Thomas Altizer has pointed out, that only a contemporary theology can be a Christian theology.

This brings me to the main point of what I want to talk about in this sermon. Exactly in this attempt to take the present situation and modern culture seriously from a theological point of view there has arisen in America a movement called the "death of God" theology. Perhaps you have heard of the so-called "death of God" theologians - Paul van Buren, William Hamilton and Thomas Altizer. If you haven't, the phrase "death of God" probably strikes you as being an incomprehensible one - how can God die? Each of the three men who are usually counted as "death of God" theologians gives this phrase quite a different meaning, but all three are in some sense agreed that today, or at least in the West today, God is dead.

In the limited time of this sermon I can hardly begin to discuss these men individually. But roughly what they have in common is this: Each of them has experienced a loss of transcendence in his life, that is, a loss of anything that stands outside of the world which we can perceive with our senses. Each of them in taking modern Western culture seriously has noticed that men seem to be getting along quite well without bothering much about religion or God. And yet, while all three want to abandon belief in God for one reason or another, each sees himself in a unique relation to Jesus. For each Jesus becomes all-important and defines how man is to live in relation to the world.

While there is much that can be said in criticism of these men, there are also things we can learn from them. The loss of transcendence, which they feel, may not be as real for most of you, because for them this seems to be largely determined by the technological, secularized culture of modern America. Nevertheless, their inability to conceive of, or experience the otherness of God is their gravest fault. And yet their loyalty to Jesus and the Incarnation and their willingness to be obedient to him is not understandable unless in him they have encountered something other, something transcendent of their own selves and culture. I think they would have more adequately talked of the death of a certain way of thinking about God, the death of the abstract, metaphysical Supreme Being of Western philosophy, rather than the other hidden, but living, ever-active, creative God of the Bible. I am reminded of one of my hymns, for it applies well here:

"Our little systems have their day; They have their day and cease to be; They are but broken lights of Thee, And Thou, O Lord, art more than they."

What we are experiencing is the death of certain theological ideas which were only broken

lights of God. We should be thankful for the death of some of these ways of thinking about God, for I think we are perhaps now in a position to have a clearer view of the Lord whom we find in the Old Testament and who himself comes to us in Jesus and to better understand what "the voice of absolute silence" which Elijah heard on Mount Sinai might mean for us today. So let us turn them to what it is that we might positively learn from modern radical theology.

The positive side of these three men's thinking is expressed in how they interpret their relationship to Jesus. For Van Buren this means to be free like Jesus; for Hamilton it means Jesus is our place to be; and for Altizer it means merely the discovery of a secular, technological society. Especially for Van Buren and Hamilton to be a follower of Jesus means to be involved in those issues of our time where we can be helpers in achieving dignity and justice. This may at first sound like a return of the old social gospel pure and simple. And perhaps the theology behind the original social gospel was not always the best either, but in so far as Christians, as men of the biblical faith, are called upon to take the world seriously, we are called upon to get off of Mount Sinai and down into the thick of things, in other words to go out of the churches and participate in God's work in the world. We cannot lightly dismiss the stirring of the Church today in an effort to be more creatively involved in the secular issues of our time.

Indeed the very difference between the biblical God and the other Gods was his hiddenness, his unwillingness to be located in a temple, his unwillingness to let man see his face. But this was a hiddenness which always involved him in the affairs of the world, an activity which only certain people could perceive. Thus, the message of the Bible is presented primarily in terms of events, in terms of real historical happenings - the escape of a group of slaves from Egypt, their wanderings and eventual conquest and settlement of an area at the south-eastern corner of the Mediterranean, the destruction of a capital city and the exile of its people in a foreign country, the return from exile, and the death of a carpenter at the hands of Roman and Jewish authority. Not every body recognized the significance of what was going on in these events, but those who did know that this was God's main sphere of activity - the secular world, not the temple, not the holy places, not the cult, in short not inside the walls of the churches.

In this connection I find Hamilton's understanding of Jesus as a "place to be" very provocative, even though I cannot agree with much of the rest of his Hamilton. The Christian's task, Hamilton says, is to unmask Jesus who is hidden in the world and then to become Jesus in and to the world. This seems to say that Jesus has gone out ahead of us into the world and it is our job to recognize his presence, to discern where obedience to Jesus requires us to be. And proclaiming Jesus to the world means we must accept that place for ourselves. For Hamilton this means identifying ourselves with our fellow men in their sufferings and struggles.

As Paul interprets the meaning of Christ for us it is made even clearer that being properly related to God has little to do with a religious system, to which the Galatian Christians of his day were in danger of reverting. Paul writes, "When we were children, we were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe. But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So through God you are no longer a slave but a son... For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not

Youth Column
My Dear Youngsters,
By now most of you have finished your holidays and are back at school or college. Though you have had a good holiday, I hope you are all happy to be back at your books. Or is it your friends, the games and all other school activities that make you glad that the new term has begun? If you like everything else at school except your books, I am sorry for you.

Learning is such great fun. There is so much in life we do not know anything about and school gives us such an opportunity to learn so many things so easily because we have teachers who take time to impart knowledge to us. When we enjoy doing anything it ceases to be work and becomes a pleasure. Imagine how wonderful it would be if studies became a pleasure, instead of a drudgery. We all have some subjects we enjoy studying and others we do not particularly like. Suppose it is Mathematics you do not like and you are repeating your G. C. E. (O) Level. Praying morning and evening for success in the examination and forgetting about it at school will not get you through it. Yes, you may pray about it as we can take very problem to the Lord in prayer, but do also take your prayer with you into your class room. As the next Mathematics period begins, breathe a quick prayer saying, "Lord show me how to enjoy this subject, please show me where I have been wrong, and then through that period listen very carefully and give your full attention to the subject alone. If your work for the day is under the mark 25, you may begin to realise that you have not quite understood it, because you are not sure of theorems 23 and 24. Your prayer is being answered. The first thing to do is to sit down and learn theorems 23 and 24. Don't postpone doing it. By doing this you are helping God to answer your prayer. Only make it a habit in all things not to leave for tomorrow what you can do today. God is working in you quietly helping you. When we learn to see our mistakes let us do all we can to put them right. When you face the truth about any problem it is already half solved. Not only in your studies but in all things the truth shall make you free. Let us pray for diligence, discipline, consistency and dedication in our search for knowledge and wisdom.

Yours Sincerely,
PETER RABBIT.
C/o The Editor
Morning Star
Vaddukottai.

submit again to a yoke of slavery." (Galatians 4:3-7; 5:1)
In Christ we are no longer slaves to any legal or anti-social system. We are no longer children, but sons. Note the distinction Paul makes between children and sons. As sons we are free from all religious systems, but this also means we are more responsible than we ever before to God our Father. A son is called upon to participate in his Father's work, to be the junior partner in what the Father is doing. As sons we must perceive what God is doing now and join in, co-operate in his liberating, reconciling activity in history, so that we might be God's covenant partners in his work in the world today.

We must look to the hints God has dropped in the past to make out what he is doing now. Might he who freed a band of slaves and who came himself to proclaim release to the captives be doing anything in the ministry of reconciliation in the recent caste disputes in which area, or is this something which the only Buddhist priests from the South can heal? Can we perceive God at work in our world? Is there a place for us to be? If we find there is, then the command will be, "Go; go down from the mountain. There is your place too."