

MODERN WORLD AND THE GOSPEL

1. **We in the modern world**

We are all living in this modern, “post-modern” world. How are we living here? Who are we, living in this world? Does the message, the reality of the message of the gospel, does the reality of Jesus as the living Lord, have any real impact on our life? Is he just a very important, beautiful ornament, which we use to distinguish us from those, for whom he is not important, that being the only difference between them and us? Does he shape and reshape constantly, the reality of our life? Is he more than an object of piety and deep feelings, not allowed, really, to impinge on our life?

Is there, again, on the whole, any difference between Christians and other people, religious non-Christians or agnostics? Are they, ethically, better human beings? There are some good Christians and bad Christians. There are very good non-Christians and bad non-Christians. There are no real differences here. In fact, we have to agree that we are as power ridden as everybody, hypocritical, seeking our advantage, wishing to have what we like, wishing to have an agreeable life with all the niceties nowadays belonging to it. We are hating and loving, dealing with people as everybody everywhere is doing. Probably even we are worse. Christians were and are, in world history, the most keen and successful to conquer the world and destroy the habitat of everybody everywhere. We are constantly paying off our bad conscience by doing good things, probably making things worse.

We are, that seems clear, caught up in vicious circles. Whatever we change or try to change, we always come back on the same spot, with more or deeper desperation. There must be something totally wrong in our seeking to be good Christians. In fact we are all too often still caught up in religion and its categories, of good people and bad people, good deeds and bad deeds, results and failures. The gospel does not know about all this. Jesus just brings another world, in which all measuring disappears.

2. **Modern World**

Our modern world is a world in which more and more all structures are lost. Structure means form, character. Possibilities to distinguish, to see differences. Differences between persons, which are not accidental. Between situations. Between cultural, good and bad. Structure means that we can make choices, which are not fortuitous, which are not entirely depending on our whims and our moods, which are objective and, for ourselves and others, explainable in objective terms. When there are structures we know whom to honour, whom to obey, what is honest and dishonest, which is our place, what are our rights and duties.

Now structure. And so differences are fading away. More and more we are lost in an ocean, in which there are no real differences. There are only kind fishes around and very dangerous ones. Any moment the kind ones can show themselves as dangerous ones. In this ocean we have to exist and to try to get the best of it. With the help or without the hindrance of religion. Or both. We are all in an endless and continuing power fight. The

fight to have, to be excellent, to be safe. To have the life we wish and to have all the niceties which belong to the wished life. Because there are no structures any longer everything which is left of the old structures is used in this eternal fight: ethics, religion, old understandings how things have to be. They are not any longer the lines along which our life gets form. They are all used in the fight against the others.

This is true for the whole world. In our post-Christian Western world, and certainly in its very own manner in the third world, the situation for Christians is especially enticing. They are the people who know of God (god?). If he is with you, who can be against you? You are entitled to have a good life. You can stick to your rights, against others. In a sense you are above the law, as in fact everybody is, because you are with God (god?).

When structures are fading away the old origins of culture come again on the surface. Two aspects of it are in this context very important:

- Culture, structures were founded on the scapegoat mechanism. The hidden scapegoat, the devil-god, was the foundation of culture. Culture itself is dwindling, so the scapegoats come back amongst us. In fact we are all potential or/and real scapegoats. The fear, being or becoming it is ever present. Scapegoats are devils and gods. As devils they are entitled to do everything, never caring about laws, about good and bad. And as gods they adore themselves and are adored by everybody. We all are now, everybody in his own manner, scapegoats, devil-gods. We all are becoming hybridic monsters.
- Culture is founded by violence and is in the same time the possibility to contain violence. Now that culture is disappearing, we all are always in the same time perpetrators of violence and its victims. The violence is all over the world. We are parasiting on the whole world, on other peoples, on nature, one ach other. And we are parasited. Most of us in the Western world are very well off and in the same time are in an inescapable tragic situation. It is absolutely impossible for us not to sin.

To put it again in another, personal manner: Our predicament is to be characterless. As soon as we begin to think about the situation, despair is the only possibility. Or the other one, to forget all this and to fight and to get. To have power, the power. The nice life, all the assets, as long as possible

3. The Gospel

The Gospel was written, Jesus lived in a time, which is, in many senses, comparable with ours. Anyway the world around the Mediterranean is comparably with ours, probably much more so than many centuries between the time of Jesus and our time. What does Jesus say to those, listening to him? Not: do better. Mend your way. Do at last your duties. Forget your desires. Object the law. Make the world more human. Fight against injustice. Do what you can for your neighbour. Be cautious with your possibilities and those of mankind. Nothing of all these.

He says: Just forget. Forget this world. Forget even, to begin with, your obligations to this world. Even to bury your father. Just forget. Follow me and forget everything.

Follow me and forget everything else. Following me I will show you your way, give you the manner to live. You don't need to find out what you have to do, don't need to know about ethics or the laws. I show you. Where you recognize me in your life, there is your place, there it is clear what you have to do.

Don't try to mend the world, to do things better. Swimming around in an ocean and trying to change the situation is again and just alone swimming around. It does not work. By changing we never change in fact anything when and as soon as structures have vanished.

Following Jesus, forgetting about this world and all its obligations, desires, wishes, power games, cares, anxieties, fears, we in fact get out of the ocean. Following him means that we are on an island, small island amidst of the ocean. We are not any longer helplessly and desperately swimming around. We are in peace, amidst of the havoc. We are still in the ocean (in this world), and on an island (not of this world). Our life has everything to do with the ocean, and we are not any longer a slave of it.

4. **Following Jesus**

Jesus says to us, as he did to the disciples, to Paul, to St. Francis: Follow me. They left this world, the "ocean" and came into a new one, the Kingdom. Maybe they heard the voice of Jesus in a clearer manner than we do. Anyway mostly it is not our life to leave in that manner this world, with all its striving, happiness and misery, to turn our back upon it, to forget it totally, only to live in the new world, which comes with Jesus.

To be very clear: neither did they. They certainly took clearer decisions than we mostly do, but their island too was amidst of the ocean and certainly, all too often, it disappeared under the water, as ours does so often.

The way out is not, that it is clear, to have good intentions, with which, as culture already knows since long, the way to hell is paved. To be more kind to the neighbours, to visit the parents more often, to give more money to the church or for good goals, not to curse any more, to stop buying all these unnecessary things, to eat less and meant, to stop making holidays to faraway countries, and, and, and, included to have so many fantasies about what we wish and could, it can be worthwhile, but it does not bring us any nearer to the peace of Jesus. We still are entertaining the fight we are in this world, although it looks better. Even if we have successes, in the end it only makes us desperate.

Where he, Jesus is, there is an island. An island on which we are free of fears, wishes, good intentions, strivings, desires. On which we are just us. He shows himself, in people, very concrete people who need us (Mt.25). We bring him into our life and the situation we are in, by looking at and for him. When he comes rivalry, anger, desperation, fall away. There are new ways to the other, the others.

Going this way with him it shows that we take decisions. Not good intentions, decisions, about our life. To do this, not to do that, to begin doing this, stop doing that. To do this, not to do that, to begin doing this, stop doing that. In a sense we don't take decisions. "It" decided in us, he decides in us. We are not responsible for the decisions. The responsibility is taken away. Both for the decisions and for the results. This again is very

important. As long as we are striving we are worried about results. When we follow Jesus, results don't count. God gives the harvest in His time, in His manner.

5. **Changing culture?**

Do we change the world; do we change culture in this manner? First of all: We are not responsible for the world and for culture. They are much too big to be responsible for. Our only "responsibility" is to follow Jesus, to be with him, he making us like him, and to do what he asks us to do.

We can't take upon us to change the world, because we are too small. We neither can, because we are much too much apart of this world. Our islands only stay as long as we stay with him, Jesus. Only he changes the world, beginning by changing our life. As soon as we depend on ourselves, we are only part of this world, not changing anything, how many good intentions we even have.

In fact, it is with our life as with the world as a whole. We have to wait and see, if we change. When we change, we are sure, he changed and changes us. In the same time we are sure that he does, both the world, and us as long as we stay with him. In fact we are, belonging together, belonging to Jesus, travellers in exile, traveling to the new world. In the same time always when he is there, with us, we are already in our own world, his world, the Kingdom. The beginnings of a new reshaped world.