

Young People's Forum (III,20)

Dear Young People,

You will recall that we are discussing the antithesis; that is, how a Christian must live in a wicked world as a child of God and a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. The problem arises from the fact that this present world is filled with totally depraved people who use God's creation to sin. They sin in two ways: one is that they do not do what God has commanded man to do, that is, love him, serve him, glorify him. But wicked men also sin by doing exactly the opposite of what God commands. And so the fact of the matter is that God commands us not to bear false witness against our neighbor. The positive command is: Always speak well of our neighbor. We break this commandment when we do not speak about our neighbor at all, but we also sin when we do the opposite, backbite and slander our neighbor. These two ways of sinning are sometimes called sins of omission and sins of commission.

We are just as guilty as the world is of all these sins, but we are also born again with the life of Christ given in our hearts by the work of regeneration. So, by that work of God in our hearts we have become citizens of the kingdom of Christ; we are given a home in heaven to which we shall go when we die; We are given, while we are in the world, the spiritual ability to live a new life even though we still sin and are often as wicked as the world; we are called to represent the cause of Christ's kingdom in everything we do. In other words, we must., as Scripture tells us, fight against and put down the sin that is still in us and live by the power of the new life in our hearts.

We are strange people, no matter how one looks at it. We are sinning saints, or, if that sounds better, saintly sinners. We are really two sorts of people all wrapped up in one body and soul: a child of God and a child of Satan. We are spiritual schizophrenics in a way, for two different powers are constantly struggling within us: what Paul calls in Galatians 5, the Spirit and the flesh (verse 17). The antithesis begins, therefore, in our own lives on the battlefield of our own natures.

Now all that means that we have a different attitude towards this world in which God calls us to live. While this world is indeed God's world, it is so corrupted that God is going to destroy it completely: burn it with fire, Peter says in II Peter 3:10-12. That means that this world is not very important. We are here and we have to live here, but it is only of relatively minor importance and we must consider it to be so. We are really interested in the kingdom of Christ. That kingdom is heavenly and spiritual. That kingdom is pure and sinless. That kingdom is ours when we die. That kingdom is our destination in our pilgrim's journey in life.

How must we use God's world? That is the question that confronts us now.

First of all, many times the church has been completely wrong when it has supported monasticism, or an ascetic life. The church, especially the Roman Catholic Church, has said that it was holier to live alone in the desert and practically starve yourself than it is to work and enjoy a good meal. The Roman Catholic Church has placed on a higher level of holiness those who crawl into the dark and dank cell of a monastery and subject themselves to a life far from the hustle and bustle of the world. The church did this because it really considers the world, the men in the world, and the things of the world so wicked that one can live a holier life when one runs away from the world and lives separately.

If you want to read more about this kind of life then read the biography of Anthony in my *Portraits of Faithful Saints*.

But we may not do this. Monasticism is wrong. It is wrong to flee the world. It is wrong to deny holiness to those who use it. Paul makes that clear to us in I Timothy 3:1-3. He says that those who do this are guilty of teaching a doctrine of devils. That is serious business. He calls people who teach this seducing spirits and warns that there will be such people in the latter times when many depart from the faith.

Why is it wrong to do this? It is wrong because, as Paul says in the first part of verse 4: "Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused." This world is God's world. Wicked men try to steal it from him and to make it their own. Wicked men try to do with God's world what they please and to use all God's creatures to pursue their own made lusts. They are like a man who has a treasure chest of jewels and uses the jewels to buy heroin, which he injects into his blood vessels. But even though the wicked do these things, God never relinquishes claim to his world. He makes it very clear that, while he will let these wicked people abuse his creation for a while why he is busy saving his church, the time will come when the church is all saved and all the world and everything man has made will be burned with fire in order to be transformed into a new earth joined with a new heaven that will endure forever; for it is this present creation that will be made new because Christ died for it and redeemed it with his blood.

So God's creation is good. That is where we start. Not only are trees and flowers, crocodiles and monkeys, planets and galaxies, birds and beetles good, but the things that are made from the creation are also good in themselves. We may not call them bad. They are part of God's world. Food is good; so are cars and TVs, atomic power plants and telephones, even hand phones and computers. The products of God's world are good; the question is, How do we use them?

I might add in parenthesis that some of God's creatures are so totally in the hands of wicked men that we are not able to use them rightly. This may be true of TVs, for example. The wicked are in control of TVs and the Christians have not much to say about what is on them. It is all so bad that we hardly dare to push the remote that lights up the TV. But there are still news programs, historical documentaries, programs that show us the wonders of God's creation. And if we can ignore the evolutionism, the wicked bias in the news, the lies of historical documentaries and the near pornography in ads, we can find some good in them – but not much.

At any rate, it is like a person who gives us what was once a beautiful set of furniture for our house, but it is so abused and wrecked that it borders on being unusable. The cloth is torn and the inside stuffing is oozing out. The legs are broken and the backs are almost ready to break lose from the frame. They stink of mildew, beer, rotted food that has been spilled on them. Even if we have no furniture of our own, it is a question whether we want this stuff in our homes. The furniture was once expensive and beautiful, but it has been so misused that it is of almost no value. So it is with this creation. God gave man a beautiful and perfect creation in which to live, but man ruined it and continues to ruin it.

But God himself tells us that this creation is his and that we not only may use it, but must use it and enjoy its use insofar as it is possible. We must and may enjoy a good piece of roti prata and we may enjoy satay when we order it in a Hawker's Center. Rice is to be eaten and enjoyed, and so, I guess, are Mc Donald's hamburgers – if one likes greasy food.

It is not a sin to own a car and a computer. While wicked men use cars and trucks to smuggle illegal goods from one country to another, cars can also be used to go to church or take our sick neighbor to the doctor. While computers have unbelievable filth on the web, they can also be used to write articles for the young people in CERC, which I am doing now.

It is not even wrong to be rich, for God gives to each person what he wants that person to have. James tells us that "Every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

But it is not wrong to be poor either and sometimes it is better to be poor than it is to be rich.

But this is enough for this time.

May God bless you all,

With love in the Lord,

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