

BE THOU MY VISION

Hymn 254, New St. Alban Hymnal

Allan B Barns

'We have just jumped into Christ's vision for the future', said an old friend the other day. But what did he actually mean? The future is something that grows out of the present moment. To put all our energy into just thinking about this so-called 'future' does not actually get us anywhere. It is what we DO NOW that shapes our course in God's world.

The Wise Men not only saw the Blazing Star in the East, but they did something about it. They did not just look and marvel at a unique sight, they did their best to interpret the signs of the time. They followed it out into the West. They moved forward.

Maybe, today the signs are not quite so clear, but they are certainly there. More Light and strong stimulation is coming down into our world. Preparation for the so-called New Age, you might say! On the face of it the more obvious manifestations of this new impetus can be seen in aggression, in road rage, in rape, in sex, in drugs, in nasty wars and in cruelty. Remember that it was the Liberal Catholic Bishop Wedgwood who pointed out that the inner powers (vibrations?) invoked by the Holy Eucharist, for example, were indiscriminate. They stimulated what was there in each individual. This explains a lot. It explains why, quite apart from human behaviour at the present time, poor old Mother Earth is stimulated as well, with floods and earthquakes, volcanoes and droughts around the world.

However, we need to remember that this stepped-up force that is coming through from above is also stimulating many, many good people. Charity workers, Church workers, humble people, people in high places, Scientists. Science has made such progress in recent years, particularly in the areas of the construction of the universe, the Big Bang and DNA, that it has almost caught up with the clairvoyant observations of Bishop Leadbeater and Dr. Annie Besant, and certainly with much of the Eastern teaching brought into prominence by the Theosophical Society, of which they were members.

The interconnection of all things in our Universe is at last recognised. One has only to read Stephen Hawking or Roger Penrose to have a glimpse of this, or if they are a little too technical, Darryl Reaney's book *The Death of Forever* (1991 Longman Australia Ltd, Melbourne), is surely a must. Admittedly, at present, science seems to have jumped ahead of human development. It has gained vast knowledge, but still lacks Understanding and certainly lacks Wisdom to enable that Knowledge to be used wisely.

But to concentrate for a moment on the Christian background and that of the Liberal Catholic Church in particular. Is it a reading of the times to state that 'we have jumped into Christ's vision for the future'? Certainly, one does not have to be clairvoyant to realise that 'The Holy Ones', which to us must mean The Christ and his co-workers, are trying hard to tell us something. To wake up. To prepare humanity for a fresh beginning, a New Age.

To jump right into it whether we like it or not! But what is being done about it? To recall Annie Besant again, who after her broken marriage became an avowed atheist, (maybe one should today say a Humanist), associating with Charles Bradlaugh and many well-known liberal thinkers in the late 1880s. However, she nevertheless followed the Star. She glimpsed Christ's Vision and in 1918 wrote *Esoteric Christianity* (TSP 1918). (see *Annie Besant, A Biography* by Ann Taylor, OUP 1992, or better still, A.N. Wilson's *God's Funeral* John Murray 1999. She certainly lived dangerously, so let us also live dangerously for a moment.

Other aspects of this new Vision, are the transformations and upheavals that we are seeing in the Church scene today. There are obviously many revolutions going on around us, changes in Liturgy, changes in attitude to the laity, to women, changes in Parish Work. Are there any pointers for Liberal Catholics? What should **they** be doing **now**?

Let us look briefly at just three aspects that are of fundamental importance to the Church - ideas and ideals that might be found difficult to assimilate. Nevertheless, ideas and ideals that the Church should be working on now if it is to put into effect Christ's Vision of the future; as far as that can be seen with man's limited sight. This is if it is to carry out its first Principle, its *raison d'être*: 'The Liberal Catholic Church exists to forward Christ's work in the world.'

Firstly, a great opportunity is now presented for a revision of the Liturgy, to make it more accessible to the world of today. Updating the Lectionary, revising some of the Collects and introducing new ones to meet today's conditions. Has any Church grasped the moment to use some of the phrases or quotations from the recently discovered Gnostic Gospels or even the Pseudepigrapha (e.g. the Book of Enoch)?

Secondly, what about more involvement of the laity in the government of the Church? This is something that even the Roman Church is having to deal with. Surely, with the shortage of priests, help from any quarter, particularly with administration, would make a considerable difference in doing Christ's work. Today's men and women are more than capable of the challenge.

This leads naturally into the third point: The Ordination of Women. No, it can no longer be fudged as it is at present in many Churches, or brushed under the carpet, It will have to be faced up to sometime! In God's good time! Giving the old-style Minor Orders might be a way in. This has been done in some Groups and proved to be a valuable spiritual experience to the participators and of great value to the life and vigour of the Church.

But how can one sum up these varied ideas and random thoughts? Bishop Pigott, in 1925, when he was still a Regionary Bishop produced a Pamphlet (No.4) titled *Catholicism Past and Future*. In this pamphlet he states that not only is the Liberal Catholic Church a Sacramental Church, but it is also a teaching Church and should become more and more a distributing agent for esoteric teaching - Esoteric Christianity. That should still be our Vision of the Future.

Finally, let us turn back to the Three Wise Men. They journeyed together deep into the West to find the Christ Child alive in the dark cave of matter. But what of the Fourth Wise Man Artaban of Henry van Dyke's story? He kept on stopping on the way to help others; he sold his gift (a priceless pearl) to ransom a slave. Old and penniless he thought that he would never reach the Christ Child. But The King was there all the time in his own heart.

Also what about those other Wise Men who remained in the East arguing about what to do, that it was best to stay where they were, that maybe the Star was just an illusion? For us, Shepherds of today abiding in the fields at night, there is a lot to learn from this parable.

Adventure, teamwork, stepping out into the unknown.

Is it possible that we have got a little lost in the past? Looking at the Crucifixion, at death, instead of the birth of Christ. The Liberal Catholic Church used to stress: no Crucifixes. Christus Rex, maybe. However, it should never be forgotten that, in Bishop Wedgwood's words, in the Liberal Catholic Holy Eucharist, the Son of God is 'all-pervading' with us now, in the midst of us all. Scientists have recently realised the interconnectedness of all in the universe. Surely this is the message that we have heard from the start, but mainly forgotten.

The Vision of Christ for the Future. This is our heritage.