

sprouted a new and even lusher abundance of flowers, in spite of her misery. She had experienced the last night that he had slept with her as a delicate and fleeting sweetness, and a passion and joy awaited her in his embrace which she had never known before. Now she trembled at the memory; it felt to her like the hot, spicy gust from the sun-heated gardens. Wayside bastard—those were the words that Inga had flung at her. She reached out for the words and held them tight. Wayside bastard—a child that had been conceived in secret in the woods or meadows. She remembered the sunshine and the smell of the spruce trees in the glade. Every new, trickling sensation, every quickened pulse in her body she took to be the unborn child, reminding her that now she had ventured onto new paths; and no matter how difficult they might be to follow, she was certain that in the end they would lead her to Erlend.

She sat between Ingebjørg and Sister Astrid, embroidering on the great tapestry with the knights and birds beneath the twining leaves. All the while she was thinking that she would run away once her condition could no longer be concealed. She would walk along the road, dressed as a poor woman, with all the gold and silver she owned knotted into a cloth in her hand. She would pay for a roof over her head at a farm somewhere in an isolated village. She would become a servant woman, carrying water buckets on a yoke across her shoulders. She would tend to the stables, do the baking and washing, and suffer curses because she refused to name the father of her child. Then Erlend would come and find her.

Sometimes she imagined that he would come too late. Snow-white and beautiful, she would be lying in the poor peasant bed. Erlend would lower his head as he stepped through the doorway. He was wearing the long black cape he had worn when he came to her on those nights at Skog. The farm woman had led him to the room where she lay. He sank down and took her cold hands in his, his eyes desperate with grief. "Is this where you are, my only joy?" Then, bowed with sorrow, he would leave, with his infant son pressed to his breast inside the folds of his cape.

No, that's not how she wanted things to end. She didn't want to die, and Erlend must not suffer such a sorrow. But she was so despondent, and it helped to think such things.

Then all of a sudden it became chillingly clear to her—the child

was not something she had merely imagined, it was something inevitable. One day she would have to answer for what she had done, and she felt as if her heart had stopped in terror.

But after some time had passed, she realized it was not as certain as she had thought that she was with child. She didn't understand why this did not make her happy. It was as if she had been lying under a warm blanket, weeping; now she had to get up and step into the cold. Another month passed, then another. Finally she was convinced—she had escaped that misfortune. Freezing and empty, she now felt more unhappy than ever, and in her heart a tiny bitterness toward Erlend was brewing. Advent was approaching and she had not heard a word, either about him or from him; she had no idea where he was.

And now she felt she could no longer endure the anguish and uncertainty; it was as if a bond between them had been broken. Now she was truly frightened. Something might happen and she would never see him again. She was separated from everything she had been bound to in the past, and the bond between them was such a fragile one. She didn't think that he would forsake her, but so many things might happen. She couldn't imagine how she would be able to stand the day-to-day uncertainty and agony of this waiting time any longer.

Sometimes she would think about her parents and sisters. She longed for them, but with the feeling that she had lost them for good.

And occasionally in church, and at other times as well, she would feel a fervent yearning to become part of it all, this community with God. It had always been part of her life, and now she stood outside with her unconfessed sin.

She told herself that this separation from her home and family and Christianity was only temporary. But Erlend would have to lead her back by the hand. When Lavrans consented to the love between her and Erlend, then she would be able to go to her father as she had before; and after she and Erlend were married, they would make confession and atone for their offense.

She began looking for evidence that other people, like herself, were not without sin. She paid more attention to gossip, and she took note of all the little things around her which indicated that



not even the sisters in the convent were completely holy and unworldly. There were only small things—under Fru Groa's guidance Nonneseter was, in the eyes of the outside world, exactly as a holy order of nuns ought to be. The nuns were zealous in their service to God, diligent, and attentive to the poor and the sick. Confine-ment to the cloister was not so strictly enforced that the sisters could not receive visits from their friends and kinsmen in the parlatory; nor were they prevented from returning these visits in the town if the occasion so warranted. But no nun had ever brought shame upon the order through her actions in all the years that Fru Groa had been in charge.

Kristin had now developed an alert ear for all the small disturbances within the convent's walls: little complaints and jealousies and vanities. Other than nursing, no nun would lend a hand with the rough housework; they all wanted to be learned and skilled women. Each one tried to outshine the other, and those sisters who did not have talent for such refined occupations gave up and drifted through the hours as if in a daze.

Fru Groa herself was both learned and wise. She kept a vigilant eye on the conduct and industry of her spiritual daughters, but she paid little heed to the welfare of their souls. She had always been friendly and kind toward Kristin and seemed to favor her above the other young daughters, but that was because Kristin was well trained in book learning and needlework and was diligent and quiet. Fru Groa never expected replies from the sisters. On the other hand, she enjoyed talking to men. They came and went in her parlatory: landholders and envoys associated with the convent, predicant brothers from the bishop, and representatives from the cloister at Hovedø, with which she was involved in a legal matter. She had her hands full tending to the convent's large estates, the accounts, sending out clerical garb, and taking in and then sending off books to be copied. Not even the most ill-tempered person could find anything improper about Fru Groa's behavior. She simply liked to talk about those things that women seldom knew anything about.

The prior, who lived in a separate building north of the church, seemed to have no more will than the reed pen or switch of the abbess. Sister Potentia, for the most part, ruled the house. She was primarily intent on maintaining the customs that she had observed

in the distinguished German convents where she had lived during her novitiate. Her former name was Sigrid Ragnvaldsdatter, but she had changed her name when she assumed the habit of the order, as was the custom in other countries. She was also the one who had decided that the pupils who were only at Nonneseter for a short time should also wear the attire of young novices.

Sister Cecilia Baardsdatter was not like the other nuns. She walked around in silence, her eyes downcast. She always replied meekly and humbly, acted as everyone's maidservant, preferred to take on the roughest tasks, and fasted more often than was prescribed—as much as Fru Groa would allow. And in church she would kneel for hours after the evening hymn or go there long before matins.

But one evening, after she had spent the whole day at the creek washing clothes along with two lay sisters, she suddenly began to sob loudly at the supper table. She threw herself onto the stone floor, crawled on her knees among the sisters, and beat her breast. With burning cheeks and streaming tears she begged them to forgive her. She was the worst sinner of them all—she had been stone-hard with arrogance all her days. It was arrogance and not humility or gratitude for the death of Christ the Savior that had sustained her when she was tempted in the world; she had fled to the convent not because she loved a man's soul but because she had loved her own pride. She had served her sisters with arrogance, she had drunk vanity from her water goblet, and she had spread her bare bread thick with conceit while the sisters drank ale and ate butter on their bread.

From all this Kristin understood that not even Cecilia Baardsdatter was completely pure of heart. An unlit tallow candle that has hung from the ceiling and turned filthy with soot and cobwebs—that was how she compared her loveless chastity.

Fru Groa herself went over and lifted up the sobbing young woman. Sternly she said that as punishment for her outburst Cecilia would move from the sisters' dormitory into the abbess's own bed and stay there until she had recovered from this fever.

"And then, Sister Cecilia, you will sit in my chair for eight days. We will ask your advice in spiritual matters and show you such respect because of your godly conduct that you will grow sated from the tribute of sinful people. Then you must judge whether



this is worth so much struggle, and decide either to live by the rules as the rest of us do or to continue the trials that no one demands of you. Then you can contemplate whether all the things that you say you do now so that we might look up to you, hence forward you will do out of love of God and so that He might look upon you with mercy."

And so it was. Sister Cecilia lay in the abbess's room for two weeks; she had a high fever, and Fru Groa nursed the nun herself. When she had recovered, for eight days she had to sit at the abbess's side in the place of honor both in church and at home, and everyone served her. She wept the whole time, as if she were being beaten. Afterward she was much gentler and happier. She continued to live in almost the same manner as before, but she would blush like a bride if anyone looked at her, whether she was sweeping the floor or walking alone to church.

This episode with Sister Cecilia aroused in Kristin a strong yearning for peace and reconciliation with everything from which she had come to feel herself cut off. She thought about Brother Edvin, and one day she gathered her courage and asked Fru Groa for permission to visit the barefoot friars to see a friend of hers there.

She could tell that Fru Groa was not pleased; there was little friendship between the Minorites and the other cloisters of the diocese. And the abbess was no more favorably disposed when she heard who Kristin's friend was. She said that this Brother Edvin was an unreliable man of God, always roaming about the country seeking alms in other dioceses. In many places the peasantry considered him a holy man, but he didn't seem to realize that the first duty of a Franciscan monk was obedience to his superiors. He had heard the confessions of outlaws and those who had been excommunicated; he had baptized their children and sung them into their graves without asking for permission. And yet his sin was as much due to lack of understanding as it was to defiance, and he had patiently borne the reprimands which had been imposed on him because of these matters. The Church had treated him with forbearance because he was skilled at his craft; but even in the execution of his art he had come into conflict with others. The bishop's master painters in Bergen refused to allow him to work in their diocese.

Kristin was bold enough to ask where this monk with the un-Norwegian name had come from. Fru Groa was in a mood to talk. She said that he was born in Oslo, but his father was an Englishman, Rikard the Armormaster, who had married a farmer's daughter from the Skogheim district, and they had taken up residence in Oslo. Two of Edvin's brothers were respected armorers in town. But Edvin, the eldest of the armormaster's sons, had been a restless soul all his days. He had no doubt felt an attraction for the monastic life since early childhood; he had joined the gray monks at Hovedø as soon as he reached the proper age. They sent him to a cloister in France to be educated; he had excellent abilities. From there he managed to win permission to leave the Cistercian order and enter the order of the Minorites instead. And when the brothers arbitrarily decided to build their church out in the fields to the east, against the orders of the bishop,<sup>1</sup> Brother Edvin had been one of the worst and most obstinate among them—he had even used a hammer to strike one of the men sent by the bishop to stop the work and had almost killed him.

It had been a long time since anyone had talked at such length with Kristin. When Fru Groa dismissed her, the young maiden bent down and kissed the abbess's hand, respectfully and fervently, and tears sprang at once into her eyes. But Fru Groa, who saw that Kristin was crying, thought it was from sorrow—and so she said that perhaps one day she would be allowed to go out to visit Brother Edvin after all.

And several days later Kristin was told that some of the convent's servants had to go over to the king's castle, so at the same time they could accompany her out to the brothers in the fields.

Brother Edvin was home. Kristin had not imagined that she would be so happy to see anyone other than Erlend. The old man sat and stroked her hand as they talked, thanking her for coming. No, he hadn't been to her part of the country since that night he had stayed at Jørundgaard, but he had heard that she was to marry, and he offered her his congratulations. Then Kristin asked him to go over to the church with her.

They had to go out of the cloister and around to the main entrance; Brother Edvin didn't dare lead her across the courtyard. He seemed in general quite timid and afraid to do anything that might offend. He had grown terribly old, thought Kristin.



And when she had placed her offering on the altar for the priest of the church and then asked Edwin to hear her confession, he grew quite frightened. He didn't dare; he had been strictly forbidden to listen to confessions.

"Perhaps you've heard about it," he said. "I didn't think that I could deny these poor souls the gifts that God has bestowed on me so freely. But I was supposed to exhort them to seek reconciliation at the proper place. . . . Well then. But you, Kristin, you will have to confess to the prior at the convent."

"There is something that I cannot confess to the prior," said Kristin.

"Do you think it would benefit you if you confess to me something that you wish to conceal from your proper confessor?" said the monk more sternly.

"If you cannot hear my confession," said Kristin, "then you can let me talk to you and ask your advice about what is on my mind."

The monk looked around. The church was empty at the moment. He sat down on a chest that stood in the corner. "You must remember that I cannot absolve you, but I will advise you and I will keep silent as if you had spoken in confession."

Kristin stood before him and said, "You see, I cannot become Simon Darre's wife."

"As to this matter, you know I cannot advise you otherwise than the prior would," said Brother Edwin. "Disobedient children bring God no joy, and your father has done his best for you—you must realize that."

"I don't know what your advice will be when you hear the rest," said Kristin. "The situation is such that Simon is too good to gnaw on the bare branch from which another man has broken off the blossom."

She looked directly at the monk. But when she met his eye and noticed how the dry, wrinkled old face suddenly changed and became filled with grief and horror, something seemed to break inside her; the tears poured out, and she tried to throw herself to her knees. But Edwin pulled her vehemently back.

"No, no, sit down here on the chest with me. I cannot hear your confession." He moved aside to make room for her. Kristin continued to cry.

He stroked her hand and said softly, "Do you remember that morning, Kristin, when I saw you for the first time on the stairs of Hamar Cathedral? I once heard a legend, when I was abroad, about a monk who could not believe that God loved all of us wretched, sinful souls. An angel came and touched his sight so that he saw a stone at the bottom of the sea, and under the stone lived a blind, white, naked creature. And the monk stared at the creature until he began to love it because it was so small and pitiful. When I saw you sitting there, so tiny and pitiful inside that huge stone building, then I thought it was reasonable that God should love someone like you. You were lovely and pure, and yet you needed protection and help. I thought I saw the whole church, with you inside it, lying in the hand of God."

Kristin said softly, "We have bound ourselves to each other with the most solemn of oaths—and I have heard that such an agreement consecrates us before God just as much as if our parents had given us to each other."

But the monk replied with despair, "I see, Kristin, that someone has been telling you of the canonical law without fully understanding it. You could not promise yourself to this man without sinning against your parents; God placed them above you before you met him. And won't it also be a sorrow and a shame for this man's kinsmen if they learn that he has seduced the daughter of a man who has carried his shield with honor all these years? And you were also betrothed. I see that you do not think you have sinned so greatly—and yet you dare not confess this to your parish priest. And if you think you are as good as married to this man, why don't you wear the linen wimple instead of going around bareheaded among the young maidens, with whom you have so little in common now? For now your thoughts must be on other things than theirs are."

"I don't know what I'm thinking about," said Kristin wearily. "It's true that all my thoughts are with this man, whom I yearn for. If it weren't for Father and Mother, then I would gladly pin up my hair on this very day—I wouldn't care if they called me a paramour, if only I could be called his."

"Do you know whether this man's intentions are such that you might be his with honor someday?" asked Brother Edwin.

Then Kristin told him about everything that had happened between Erlend Nikulaussøn and herself. And as she talked, she seemed to have forgotten that she had ever doubted the outcome of the whole matter.

"Don't you see, Brother Edvin," she continued, "we couldn't control ourselves. God help me, if I met him here outside the church, after I leave you, I would go with him if he asked me to. And you should know that I have now seen that other people have sinned as we have. When I was back home I couldn't understand how anything could have such power over the souls of people that they would forget all fear of sin, but now I have seen so much that if one cannot rectify the sins one has committed out of desire or anger, then heaven must be a desolate place. They say that you too once struck a man in anger."

"That's true," said the monk, "and it is only through God's mercy that I am not called a murderer. That was many years ago. I was a young man back then, and I didn't think I could tolerate the injustice that the bishop wished to exercise against us poor brothers. King Haakon—he was the duke at that time—had given us the land for our building, but we were so poor that we had to do the work on our church ourselves, with the help of a few workmen who lent a hand more for their reward in heaven than for what we were able to pay them. Perhaps it was arrogance on the part of the mendicant monks that we wanted to build our church with such splendor; but we were as happy as children in the meadows, singing hymns as we chiseled and built walls and toiled. May God bless Brother Ranulv. He was a master builder, a skilled stonemason; I think God Himself had granted this man all his knowledge and skills. I was cutting altarpieces from stone back then. I had finished one of Saint Clara, with the angels leading her to the church of Saint Francis early Christmas morning. It had turned out beautifully, and we all rejoiced over it. Then those cowardly devils tore down the walls, and the stones toppled and crushed my altarpieces. I lunged at a man with a hammer; I couldn't control myself.

"Yes, I see that you're smiling, Kristin. But don't you realize how badly things stand with you now? For you would rather hear about other people's frailties than about the deeds of decent people, which might serve as an example for you."

As Kristin was about to leave, Brother Edvin said, "It's not easy to advise you. If you were to do what's right, then you would bring sorrow to your parents and shame upon your entire lineage. But you must try to win release from your promise to Simon Andresøn. Then you must wait patiently for the joy that God will send you. Do penance in your heart as best you can—and do not let this Erlend tempt you to sin more often, but ask him lovingly to seek reconciliation with your kinsmen and with God.

"I cannot absolve you of your sin," said Brother Edvin as they parted. "But I will pray for you with all my heart."

Then he placed his thin old hands on Kristin's head and said a prayer of blessing and peace for her in farewell.



important, whether one believes the one thing or the other, to remember the old saying: Soli Deo Gloria.

Lillehammer, August-October 1919

<sup>1</sup> Fröding, Gustav (1860-1911) Swedish poet. First book of poetry "Guitarr och dragharmonika" [Guitar and accordion] (1891) characterised by excellent form, freshness and humor. The vivid images from the Värmland province made him one of Sweden's most popular poets.

<sup>2</sup> Rørdam, Valdemar (1872-1946) Danish poet. First book of poetry "Sol og sky" [Sun and Cloud] 1895. Translated English poetry into Danish. Very famous until World War II, when he wrote a poem in tribute of Adolf Hitler, which made him very unpopular.

<sup>3</sup> Kingo, Thomas (1634-1703) Danish Lutheran bishop, one of Denmark's most acclaimed hymn writers. Many of his hymns are used in Norwegian Lutheran hymn books.

Sigrid Undset 1936. Trans. Fr. John  
H. Halborg. Published in Jaki, S, 2007.  
Sigrid Undset's Quest for Truth. Real  
view Books.

## My reasons to convert

If every convert who returned to the Catholic Church would describe his path to Rome, it would probably seem that hardly two of them have taken the very same road. It is not surprising to those of us who have accepted the Church's assertion that it is the "pillar and foundation of truth" that there are as many ways to it as there are human minds.

People who stubbornly hold fast to the hope that it is impossible to find absolute truth have persuaded themselves that life would lose all of its charm, we would lose our freedom, if there existed a truth—a single one—that contains all the other truths, and if they cannot be contained in it, then they are not true. Most of us have felt at some time that it is intolerable that two times two always make four. If, to begin with, we accept this boring dogma, on this basis a whole part of one's individual growth and proficiency can be developed. If one reserves to himself the freedom to deal and count from a personal conviction that two times two make five or nothing or seven, one must take the consequences—among them other people's reprisals if this conflicts with their interests when accounts are settled by this subjective table of multiplication. Even so, we all know, in any case as a passing feeling, the longing for a dream world where two times two equals whatever we want it to. Of course the freedom of dreamland is also an illusion—in fact the number of types of dreams and combinations of

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This account by Sigrid Undset of her conversion, to which she gave no title, first appeared in *De søkte de gamle stier* ("They looked for the old way"), ed. H. Bergwitz (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1936), pp. 83-96. It was translated by Father John H. Halborg for inclusion in this book, but first published with my permission in *St. Ansgar's Bulletin*, No. 103 (2007), pp. 12-16.



dreams is not unlimited, and the life of dreams follows certain laws to a higher degree than most people would think. But what one doesn't know doesn't bother one. This is how we think; it might mean a beautiful freedom if we could move into a world where people decide for themselves the nature and properties of things. In the reality into which we are born, the nature and properties of things are already given, everything is joined together by laws. For humans as they are, there is only one possibility for freedom—they must find their way through this whole network of causes and connections. And the attempt to find a path ends only too often in becoming entangled and getting hung up in it. We can only attain one kind of freedom in this world—that which Our Lord describes when he says, "The truth will make you free." But when this truth is acknowledged and so is set free, then the deterministic factors in life no longer can bind a person in chains, then one cannot keep this freedom for anything less than by an unending struggle against the powers that one has escaped from. First and foremost, the temptation to look back and long for one's old, romantic dream world where two and two can be whatever and one can decide for himself what shall be untrue.

To this extent, it is understandable that modern man exerts all his strength to escape from the authority of the Church.—In any case so it looks when the same man for years and days has tried to avoid what he meets and demands to be an authority. These struggles to avoid being bound, and this fight against a Church that has always openly declared that it demands acceptance of its authority, are not something special to "modern" man. The same tendency made itself known already with great strength in Jerusalem at the Passover in the year Our Lord was crucified.

However, perhaps few converts are prepared to explain their conversion—how their resistance to One who calls himself the way, the truth and the life, a resistance dictated by fright and distrust, has been overcome. This does not happen without the assistance of a mystical and supernatural power that theologians call Grace. We can only tell what happened when one day we had to acknowledge that perhaps our resistance was illegitimate. We have a basic mistrust for all the authorities of this world and see that at the same time our human nature

suffers an incurable desire for authority. We want to have teachers who can teach us something, we want to have leaders who can give us dos and don'ts, we want to have superiors that we can depend on and admire, preferably also love. When I was young, there was no need for terribly clear insight to discover this, even if the world's hunger for authority had not taken the pathological forms that it afterwards took. The question arises then: do we long for authority because we really are created to bow to an authority that alone has a legitimate claim on us? An *Auctor Vitae*?

"Think for yourself" was always said to children in the school I attended. When I tried to obey this command as well as I could and the result was that I thought something different from what the teacher intended that I should think, I noticed that the teacher was unpleasantly surprised. It was as if they could not suppose that I was at odds with them for any reason other than a desire to be in opposition, a form of naughtiness—or that I had been persuaded by people who were stupid or unenlightened or untruthful because they did not think and believe like the teachers did. The school administration was one of the first groups to fight for women's rights in this country, the school spirit was colored by the leftist party of the previous century "freedom, progress, enlightenment." Wergeland and Bjørnson were their guardian spirits. I had, and have, great sympathy for many persons who belong to this spiritual persuasion; for their idealism, for their wish to serve their country or their gender or humanity as a whole. But I had discovered, long before adulthood, that those who call themselves free spirits or radical or in sync with the new time are most often unbelievably bigoted. To be a bigot does not mean that one is convinced that what one believes is right and the belief of others is crazy, but in having too little human fantasy and insight to be able to discover how one who differs can do so in good faith and complete honesty.

There was certainly also a lot of bigotry in conservative circles in those days. But in my youth the "conservatives" were for me a foreign race. Those whom I later met, for example in the years when I was an office worker, did not appeal enough to me that I did anything to really get acquainted with them. But I had the impression that they were often easier going souls and less bigoted.



The first thing that gave me a kind of connected picture of the conservative life attitude of that time was the priest [minister] who confirmed me. He was deeply repellent to me. I got the impression that, in that congregation at least, God demanded, from the youngest of girls, outside of domestically usable virtues only negative ones. I was especially disturbed when he discussed the sixth commandment with us. He turned almost exclusively to the girls from the folk school. He warned them not to let anyone give them anything, against men who wanted to "pick them up" on their free afternoons and he told a frightening story about a young girl whom he had visited in a hospital: there she lay, destroyed, "only because of one kiss." I thought angrily, the girl had done nothing sinful, the man on the other hand! And I knew very well that in our caste "ladies" practiced things that were many times more immoral than the little servant girl who had the bad luck, to sin against marriage, as they looked for men who were considered good partners if conscienceless in their work and sick.—That virginity was a positive virtue, a reservoir of strength, not just a negotiable value in the marriage market, one could not expect a priest [minister] in that spiritual milieu to impress on us. That a woman became an "old maid" was a bit of misfortune and a subject for laughter. I had read what Luther wrote about virginity, and it made me very anti-Lutheran. I didn't go to Ragna Nielsen's school for nothing.

I did not doubt at the time that this priest [minister] was in good faith and that he very well could be prepared to suffer and sacrifice for his unappealing faith. And it did not occur to me to accept his version of Christianity as being a more authentic version of Christianity than any of the other versions I had stumbled across. Even so, confirmation instruction made me see clearly that I did not believe in the religion which I, despite everything, in my childhood and youth, had conceived that I stood in a not too distant and undetermined relation to.

In Protestantism, as I had come to know it, it was unfortunate that almost everyone I met who had some kind of a religious position, had his own "personal conviction" or his "own concept" about Christianity. The God whom the religion teacher in school had taught us about was far more sympathetic than the Uranienborg church's very human, truly human God. But not more human than the noblest humanity I was

prepared to conceive for myself. Wise, but not wise beyond all human understanding. Like many other young persons from an open minded milieu I had the impression that one's faith was a private matter, not to say an unimportant matter. I also had my own faith, but I did not seem to need any God at that time; he should be there to say yes to my own ideas of right and wrong, honorability or unworthiness, my ideals and prejudices.

They were as they might be according to my nature and my education. I considered that to be sufficient. I myself was able to live with them without constructing a God who would agree with me.

A God who was "the Absolute Other" and also a person who could communicate with me—whose ways were not my ways, whose will was absolute and distinct so as to be separate from my own will, but who could also lead me into his ways and attune my will to be in harmony with his will. I was not daring enough to dare to conceive such a thing.

They who had spoken to us in the name of Christianity had not only in that name sought justification for their own habitual ways of thoughts and ideals. A great many of them had given up historic Christianity as a teaching that was no longer tenable, even if they, from a position purely based on feeling, could not say farewell to a Christian-tinged concept of life. They had surrendered faith in Jesus Christ, God and Man, but they continued to worship Jesus, the son of the carpenter as an ideal human and a human ideal. Dogmas—truth, revealed from the "Other Side" and formulated in human languages—they could not believe in, but they believed in religious intuition and the religious genius in men.

I was absolutely not disposed for any form of worship of a man and would not believe in some other person's intuition especially not of a person who said of himself, "learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart" even as he spoke against his adversary in a way that, to say the least, was arrogant. Certainly the one who said this was nothing more than a genius. I proceeded from "proven" (without asking for proofs) that the historic Jesus was a religious genius, whose intuition had brought people's concept of God many steps along on the path of development. At that time we all took as a starting point that development was the same as improvement, in any case when we had



any special thoughts on the matter. But I thought it could not interest me very much that a young Jew nineteen hundred years ago had gone around and assured people that their sins were forgiven—especially when he said of himself, “Who can convict me of any sin?” Then from his own experience of life he could not know how it felt to do anything to someone else that one would have given almost anything to have had undone, or to have failed one’s own best intentions so badly, that it seemed to be unforgivable. I knew what repenting of acts of cruelty to others was, secret cowardice, indolence when indolence was unpardonable, clearly I had not managed to live according to my own humanistic private religion in a way that could satisfy me, but it could be worse: I did not want to lower myself to that which seemed saddest of all, comparing myself with people who seemed in any case to be living by looser standards. In the first place I certainly didn’t know them well enough from the inside to judge them rightly. And as far as I knew, they had never set themselves up to applaud my moral conceits either.

“*Si non est Deus, non est bonus.*” At that time I didn’t know that others had said this a long time ago. But I knew enough history to know that historic Christianity had proclaimed a Jesus who could forgive all people all of their sin, because He is God and Creator and all our sins against ourselves and others are first and foremost sins against Him. He can forgive sins, because all power is given to him in heaven and on earth, even the power to change the evil we have done to others to become something good again. This was the Christ that Saint Olav had made known to those who came and prayed, believing in the king’s captivating personality: “If you will believe in me, you should believe what I teach you: you shall believe that Jesus Christ has created heaven and earth and every person.”

Even so, it was Renan’s *Life of Jesus* and a number of other attempts to reduce the life of Christ to a “historic Jesus” that first got me to understand how incredible it was that a man who was even a little like these phantoms would have inspired his surviving friends to such life and death adventures as are recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.

I was still far from believing that Jesus was God revealed in human form and the Church the organism where he remained to do the

work of salvation that he, nineteen hundred years ago, had completed on the cross together with a new generation. But I saw more clearly what I had to some degree understood that the new systems of religion, that either built on godlessness or on humanity with a sort of deism, were not the least bit more “scientifically” based than the ancient religions. To the contrary—to a higher degree they were based on hypothesis and were to a higher degree a matter of taste. Many of the current suppositions that I had uncritically let go in one ear, but unfortunately not out the other, were in reality weak opinions based on speculations of the time or of the milieu. I don’t know, for example, how often I had heard that God was a human pipe dream, and that faith in a life after death most nearly was composed by an indecent greed for more life than the portion that nature found proper to give us. Now I saw that the first supposition was like a knife that cuts two ways: it was difficult to believe about most of the free thinkers I knew they wished that a God existed who let them tell the future, though they did not permit him to rule; just the opposite, most of them suffered from theophobia. I knew that I did so also—most often. I knew that people have believed in a life after death, but that it was seldom an inviting way of life, in hell or hades, they have believed in as a fact rather than they were obliged to find themselves in. I could not think of any form of eternal life that would not be terribly long. All the good things of earth finally have their charm in our knowledge that we are only able to enjoy them for a time. The miracle of the changing seasons of the year goes through bone and marrow because we know that sooner or later a spring will come that we will not experience; that one year the first snow will fall on the mound of earth that covers us. Even those persons we are fondest of—would we appreciate them as much if we did not know that at last death will separate them from us? All life is like that. This was the old story—I had dismissed the faith and superstitions of others because they were naggingly full of their idiosyncrasies. But I realized that my own thoughts were also to a large extent determined by my idiosyncrasies. Naturally I could have stayed with trusting in “my own might and power,” knowing well that it was not much to trust in. But they who in the old days had managed with such a minimal faith, had not given it out as being anything else than a hand weapon with which they could



get through their short lives—in any case they had not sentimentalized it and they had not given out that they believed in any brotherhood, not in play or love or battle.

I could not get rid of the feeling that anyone who isolates himself this way is a betrayer—even if I could not say in what the betrayal consisted or what I had betrayed. I believed in the brotherhood of man, although I found it impossible to persuade myself to believe in human perfectibility—I only believed in the stupidity and intelligence of people, in human goodness and evil—and in our cowardliness and in the unstable nature of every person. I took more pride in a certain few than in most people I had met. And yet I felt that it was certainly true what the Salvation Army Soldier (she had been our servant girl in my youth) had said that God loves sinners, “the greater sinner a person is, the more He loves him.” So he had to love most these—humanly seen—most perfect humans because they were always in the danger of sinning in their mind and in their thoughts in a worse way than usual decent swindlers and whores could dream of.

All the human properties and gifts that make someone equipped to be a teacher and guide and leader in the world may make him into a conscious or unconscious offender against his dependents, unless he knows himself to be bound in a personal relationship of responsibility to someone who stands over all mankind and holds mankind as if in his “hand.” Christianity explained this in a way that had consistency, truth and likelihood more than any other attempt at a philosophy of life. Human solidarity consists in all of us being inheritors in a bankrupt estate. The bankruptcy of the fall into sin: a common loss of our nature to overcome the point of failure in our virtues and our insight makes it impossible for anyone not to lead his fellow humans astray. Only a supernatural intervention can save us from ourselves. The Christian Church taught that Jesus himself was this intervention—God who by letting himself be born of a woman made himself to have solidarity with our nature, and by letting himself be killed for the sake of our sins had shown us the way to eternal life—not the existence in hell or hades that had been looked forward to with such a horrified fright, but a life in and with God, the eternal blessedness that we are unable to conceive of. But already in the present life on earth we can experience so much contact

with the divine that we can know that life can be happy, even a life without end, when we can continually renew our strength of life from the strength from which everything in the world is an outpouring.

At last I had come far enough that I understood, though I certainly did not believe in God! But I believed even less in my disbelief. Proofs that force us, against our will, to accept Christianity, as we accept, for example, a demonstrated pattern of descent in botany (even if the demonstrated proven facts are not as many as one's school teacher believed) were not to be thought of. How otherwise could Christ say, “He who believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be damned.” This does not presuppose naturally that no one uses his faculty of judgment. But, finally man chooses with his will; either he will isolate himself in himself and the hell of egotism, or will give himself over to God in power and be freed from the cage of ego worship and to eternal possibilities.

I had nothing else to do but go to a priest and ask to be taught all that the Catholic Church really taught. That the Catholic Church was identical to the Church that Christ had founded, I had for myself never doubted—for me the question of the authority of the Catholic Church was entirely a question of the authority of Christ. I had never understood the history of the reformation as other than a history of a revolt against Christianity, even if it was a revolt of believing Christians who, subjectively pious, hoped that a true Christianity agreed better with their subjective idea of Christianity than the factual one, as the impression it often made in a world where the holy fares ill in the hands of unholy people.

The common objections to Catholicism that I had heard never made a deep impression on me although I had a rather vague concept that there was some truth in the prejudices against the Church because they were so widespread. Here, too, there are three particularly good grounds. One is our dislike of giving up our pet fantasies that we are afraid that a teaching church will take from us. The other is the anger that foolish Catholics of all times have caused. The last is the dark side of the bright doctrine of the communion of saints.

It should be easier for people today, I think, to discover the meaning of the merits of the saints as a treasure that the whole church



has good use for. For just in our time not only Catholics but Christians of any sect and persuasion experience, namely, that all of Christendom must do penance for what all of us unholy Christians owe to God and our neighbor. No human solidarity is as absolute as the solidarity between the living cells in the mystical body of Christ.

In and of itself the cult of the saints that the Church from its beginning has fostered answers a need that seems to be unsatisfiable in our nature. We want to practice hero worship. For want of anything better, we have hero-worshipped kings and gangsters, sportsmen and artists, film stars and dictators. We have to set up someone on a pedestal to adore something of ourselves in them. In the saints, God's purpose with us is realized, when he, to use the words of the Offertory, "in a wonderful way created human nature and still more wonderfully redeemed it." Only looking at the saints can we find the answer to our need for hero-worship, without at the same time worshipping something of our own nature that is cowardly and degrading to worship.

And Mary worship? I have always thought that this was self evident: if someone believes that God has saved us by taking on Him our flesh and blood they should embrace her in whose womb He built His human body with feelings that are not like other men's feelings for another person: a special, deep reverence, gentleness, sympathy with the incomprehensible human weaknesses, and joy at man's incomprehensible place in the kingdom of God—for if it is true that the son of Mary is true God and true man, so the son is a son and the mother a mother in all eternity: He alone is the creator and she is His creation. The word "worship" means two different things. We speak of worshipping our creator and worshipping the woman whom he set on his created earth as a flower, and certainly there is no Catholic who is not fully convinced of this.

Constraint of conscience and freedom of conscience? Those who praised freedom of conscience most highly are very often the same people that, it seems to me, have the greatest need of someone to guide their conscience with a firm hand. When someone, for example, took liberties with the good name and reputation of his neighbor and spread rumors that my conscience, even in my most heathen days, would not have permitted me to do. And I did not know if it was only my

conscience or if it was my conscience as my parents had trained it: they said that one person knows so little about another, that the only thing one can say with assurance when someone tells a story about someone else, is that in any case it doesn't seem to be true: people who are a little inclined to gossip are always a little mentally retarded, and when they spread gossip it is only a form of the slovenliness that those weak in the head often suffer from. But I have never been able to understand if they acted against their better knowledge or against their conscience. On the whole—what haven't men done to men? And am I right to insinuate, they continue to do it because they did it against their conscience? But when I have so little faith that other people's conscience can always say the right thing, should I presume to believe that my conscience does not need an external guide?

Because I believe that Jesus Christ is God who has created us, I believe that He has built the Church that humankind needs. It is difficult to express in words what God has given me through His Church. He himself said that He gives us his peace, but not the peace the world gives, it is of another kind. Perhaps it can be compared with the peace that governs the great depths of the sea. Good and bad weather on the surface do not affect it, nor the rare beasts that live and eat up each other in the deeps. It is the practical experience that the Kingdom of God is within us—even though it is surrounded by our own unpeaceful selves, half reality, half illusion—but we experience that God in a supernatural manner continually is within us and continues to maintain his kingdom in us against our own attacks on it.