

THIS DISQUIETING LITTLE BOOK

November 1963 editorial

A survey on 'reading the Gospel' has been done among some three hundred couples of Teams. I have just read their answers with interest. I will not claim, of course, to give you the complete results in a few lines. I believe, however, that I should give you my thoughts on a reaction that I have frequently come across:

Many couples admit in similar terms that *"at the thought of immersing ourselves in the Gospel, we often succumb to the temptation of giving it a miss. No doubt this is a defensive reaction"*.

I have read in several answers: *"In truth, the Gospel scares us"*.

And among those who do read the Gospel, many echo, in one way or another, the words of the couple who wrote: *"When we, married people, open the Gospel, it is always with the feeling that we shall never carry out what it asks of us. Christ does not tolerate half measures... We feel discouraged."*

"Discouraged", "worried", "overwhelmed"... How often these words re-occur!

There is no doubt that the demands of Christ go terribly far:

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Mt 10: 34).

"No one can serve two masters; he will either love the one and hate the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth" (Mt 6: 24).

"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mt 19: 24).

"No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God" (Lk 9: 62).

"Follow me and let the dead bury their own dead" (Mt 8: 22).

"If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell" (Mt 5: 29).

"Then he said to them all, if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me" (Lk 9: 23).

"None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions" (Lk 14: 33)

"For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life and there are few who find it" (Mt 7: 14).

Did Christ, therefore, only speak to discourage people of good will?

Indeed, in offering us this ideal in all its blinding starkness, he does intend us to adjust our life to it; but he also - and first of all - wants us to face up to our way of thinking about these demands and of living with them so that we can discover what it is in us that rejects and gainsays them so that we may be aware of our condition as sinners.

And isn't this what troubles us most cruelly? We have such a great need to be satisfied with ourselves and to give ourselves full mark; yet, if we open the Gospel, we are bound to condemn ourselves. But this is precisely what Christ wants us to face up to. The Publican's attitude does not readily come to us: *"God, be merciful to me a sinner"* (Lk 18:13).

To discover that we are sinners and that we cannot liberate ourselves, however much we may wish to do so and therefore to recognise that we have an imperative need of a Saviour, such is the first conviction that Christ wants to awake in all people. Let those who will not allow Christ do so, not claim that they have already committed themselves to follow him.

True, the evangelical ideal is difficult to achieve but if, first of all, we accept, believe and acknowledge how far we are from this ideal and sincerely want to conform our life to

it, then the Lord's grace will come to our help. It has achieved many other miracles! "*Nothing is impossible to God*"; and so discouragement is inappropriate.

If, however, we have no desire to be turned away from self-love and from our high opinion of ourselves, let us take care not to open the Gospel. It is a terribly disquieting little book. By this I mean that it disturbs our peace of mind and gives it a hard time.