

The Charles Williams Society

NEWSLETTER

No. 35, AUTUMN 1984

MEETINGS OF THE CHARLES WILLIAMS SOCIETY

23 February 1985: Joan Wallis will speak on "Charles Williams and the poets - Wordsworth".

11 May 1985: A.G.M. followed by a talk by Rev Dr Brian Horne on "Biblical allusion in The Divine Comedy."

Meetings will be held at Liddon House, 24 South Audley Street, London W1, at 2.30pm.

LONDON READING GROUP

24 March 1985 - location to be confirmed in the next Newsletter.

OXFORD READING GROUP

For details contact either Anne Scott (Oxford 53897) or Brenda Boughton (55589).

LAKE MICHIGAN AREA READING GROUP

For details contact Charles Huttar, 188th W.11th St., Holland, Michigan 49423 USA, telephone (616) 396 2260.

REPRINTS OF C.W. BOOKS

Members may be interested to know that the publishers Eerdmans are issuing reprints of He Came Down From Heaven and The Forgiveness of Sins in November 1984.

REFERENCE TO C.W.

Seasons of the Spirit - readings through the Christian Year selected by George Every, Richard Harries and Kallistos Ware, published by SPCK at £7.50 contains a quotation from C.W.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Some subscriptions are still outstanding despite reminders. The Committee have decided that those who have not paid their subscription for 2 years will be deemed to have resigned.

The Treasurer has requested that, because of the high charge levied by the banks to exchange other currencies into sterling, all cheques paid to the Society should be made out in sterling.

NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome is extended to:

Cheryl L Thompson, 190 Madison Drive, Newark, Delaware, 19711, USA
Jeffrey Hempstead, Box 116, Deposit, New York, 13754, USA
Zenna Freese, Apt.1, 118 South Lake Avenue, Albany, New York, 12208, USA
Joseph Vanachter, Kolenstraat 60, Puurs, Belgium
Mrs Mary Publicover, 293 Heeley Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 6EL
Mrs Diana T Edwards, University of Victoria, PO Box 1700, Victoria, British Columbia, V8W 2Y2 Canada.

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On 10 November 1984, Canon Raymond Hockley addressed the Society on "Reflections on some aspects of the theology of Charles Williams". We are pleased to be able to reproduce the talk in the Newsletter.

"Before time and space ever existed there was One who has always been, who is now and ever shall be: the God whose name according to the Hebrews means I AM what I AM or I WILL BE what I WILL BE. There never was a time when I AM was not. God was not created by anyone, and before God created anything he alone existed through endless ages and ages. This One, Adonai, the Lord, El-Elyon, the Most High God, Sabaoth, the Lord of Hosts, is life, being itself, infinite and eternal. In appearance, one might say he is pure light: not the light even of a thousand suns, but the indescribable light of Glory. Infinity and eternity are filled with his glory, a glory so radiant that millions upon millions of stars are dim and tawdry in comparison. This One, this I AM, is not individual but community; not as it were, one person but three: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All three have existed together beyond the incalculable centuries and aeons of time. Always and always the Son was and is generated (or begotten) by the Father: always and always the Holy Spirit was and is proceeding from the Father and the Son. From time without beginning I AM is the holy, blessed and glorious Trinity, three persons and one God. Always and always the Father is delighting in his Son and the Holy Spirit is the love that passes between them: the Lover, the Beloved and the Love. This Triune God needed and needs nothing. His life is perfect love and he is perfectly loved. He was under no constraint to do anything or create anything, because there never had been nor could there ever be any action more perfect nor any object more wonderful than his own being. Yet the superabundance of divine love within God was and is so immense and unreserved and overflowing that quite freely and gratuitously he created out of nothing a vast world of spiritual beings. From beginningless time they were not: then suddenly they were - Cherubim and Seraphim, Thrones, Dominions, Authorities, Powers, Principalities, Archangels and Angels - circle upon circle, sphere upon sphere, like specks of reflected light in the rays of that central radiant glory. The Angelicals are, of course, nothing like those pictures which appear on Christmas cards. They are not blonde girls with silver wings floating around in white nighties. They are, rather, flames of fire leaping and dancing through and around the Eternal Light which gave them birth. And from that moment of appearance they have never ceased to sing 'Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts, Heaven and earth are full of thy glory, Hosanna in the Highest'.

Among those spiritual beings was one so surpassingly beautiful that he was named Lucifer, the Bearer of Light. He was the perfect image of his Creator, who looked into the heart of the Holy Trinity and, to his complete amazement, saw that God was preparing a far higher place in heaven than his for creatures, coarse and crude, made of flesh and hair and bone and blood. Indeed, he saw that God himself was preparing to become such a vile body and to set that vile body upon the very Throne of Heaven. So Lucifer turned his back upon the Beatific Vision, together, apparently, with seven million, four hundred and five thousand, nine hundred and ninety-eight other angels, flying and falling into the ever-receding twilight where Being borders upon Nothing, to the Outer Darkness. So Lucifer became Satan, Mephistopheles, Ashtaroth, Abaddon, Mammon, Asmodeus, Belphegor, Beelzebub. God did what was in his eternal being to do: out of his free and pure and gratuitous love he created matter; the galaxies of stars, worlds upon worlds, millions of swirling masses of gas and lumps of mud and he created this world of water and earth, of trees and herbs, of animals, fish and birds; and above all, of men and women - creatures made in the image and likeness of God, reflecting the perfection of God, living embodiments of the spiritual being of God. And then, because the perfect being of God required it, God was made man, the Creator became what he himself had created. The timeless and limitless God so reduced his infinity and eternity as to become flesh in the man Jesus of Nazareth. The One who gave birth to the stars was born of a woman. So, the I AM who is without beginning and without end, the perfect and pure being, God, is united for ever to his material creation: he is bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, never to be separated from us. In the very heart of heaven, in the very being of God is human nature. As the Antiphon at the Hours in the Office of St Mary

(on Saturdays) says: 'O wondrous interchange! the Creator of mankind, taking upon him a living body, vouchsafed to be born of a Virgin: and proceeding forth without seed as Man, hath bestowed upon us his own Deity.' In the man Jesus Christ God united himself to the substance of man; and in Jesus Christ man is united to the essence of God. As Saint Athanasius said, 'God became man that we might become God'. So, one might say, when Christ entered heaven the angels and archangels rejoiced to see that the glory which the Father gave the Son is shared by mortal men and women. The nature of God, it seems, requires that eternity and infinity shall be subject to time and matter. God cannot be, is not, pure spirit but must be and is one with our 'glorious and holy flesh'.

That is a way of putting, I would like to think, what might have been a preliminary introduction to Charles Williams's book He Came Down From Heaven. Not, of course, that he would have used my words, but the thought is, I trust, consistent with his. The Williams doctrine of coinherence pre-supposes the union of God and man. This talk may, indeed, be regarded as an extended footnote on a footnote that Charles Williams placed in his book The Forgiveness of Sins. The text itself reads: 'The beginning of specific creation was the will of God to incarnate. God himself is pure spirit; that is, in so far as any defining human word can apply to him, he is pure spirit. He had created matter, and he had determined to unite himself with matter. The means of that union was the Incarnation; that is, it was determined that the Word was to be flesh and to be man.' (p.119). Williams' footnote reads: 'It will be obvious from what follows that I am here following one arrangement of doctrine rather than what is perhaps the more usual. But I am instructed that it is no less orthodox'. Indeed it has very respectable ancestry; for it derives from no less than Duns Scotus. In other words my footnote is an extended comment on the doctrine that it was the will of God to be incarnate, that God chose and chooses to be both matter and spirit. So let us continue.

One of the most extraordinary statements in the Bible is the commandment 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God'. We are, it seems, deliberately to make ourselves do something which can actually happen spontaneously. We have got to love, not simply in terms of duties done, but with 'all our heart, and all our soul, and all our mind and all our strength'. Equally extraordinary is Christian preaching which proclaims that the gates of heaven are open, that we do not have to earn our salvation by our own merit, that admission to the City of God is free. But, unfortunately, nobody can find the entrance unless he really believes that the admission is free and behaves in a way consistent with that belief. If you ask, How am I to get in? you will be told that you have to have faith. But faith is a gift. Yet you have to have it in order to get in. Faith, which cannot be self-induced and which you cannot find by your own efforts, is demanded as a ticket of admission. Only, you cannot buy the ticket: it has to be complimentary. So: here are two impossible demands: thou shalt love, which you cannot make yourself do; and thou shalt have faith, which you cannot get for yourself by any effort of your own will. And there is another impossibility: apparently, also, by an effort of your own will you have to give up your own will. It is all, to use a nice northern expression, barmy. Well now, there are two ways of reaching the house next door: one is to travel all the way round the world, the other is to walk a few feet. There are two ways of finding the heavens: one is to journey upwards and upwards in quest of an ever receding firmament, the other is to realise that this planet is one of the company of celestial bodies. There is only one way of finding God: and that is to realise that he is here and now and has never been away. God is not a distant deity controlling and manipulating the universe; he is one with it. The unlikely and astonishing fact is that the infinite God leapt from his royal throne and was made man, that the eternal lover united himself to his mortal beloved. Therefore, we do not have to climb to the infinite in search of God for God descends to the finite and unites himself to us. He takes our nature, he assumes our limitations, he suffers our pains, he dies our death. The God who is spirit unites himself for ever to his material creation. Thus Jesus says: 'The glory which thou hast given me I have given them: that they may be one even as we are one. I in them and thou in me: that they may be perfectly one.' To understand that lovely and adorable affirmation merely as a prayer for the unity

of the Church is to limit, misinterpret and distort it. Those words are statement not prayer: for they rejoice in the fact that God and man are not separate but one undivided whole. God has made himself one in love and one in life with every errant and infinite member of his universe here and now. He remains at one with us even when we commit every unimaginable depravity, even when we crucify him.

'God is love' is a Christian theological axiom: but their doctrine, their prayer, their worship, their life, prove that they do not know or feel or experience or give love. It is the nature of love to hold nothing back, to expend itself without residue or reserve, to give itself without limit. If we understood and felt such love we would realise that God pours his entire being on every single object of his love, that he is with us and in us from the start: we would know that we do not have to try somehow or other to get union with God for we cannot get away from it.

God does not play a sort of celestial game of hide and seek, frustrating those who seek him for as long as possible. Daily, hourly, minute by minute, God is in union with us. It is, I repeat, not that we have to get union with God: it is that we cannot get away from it. The Eternal Lover has created us so that he could fall in love with us. Yet we are like fish trying to jump out of the water, like lost travellers trying to find the way when they have already arrived. You do not have to do anything. There is nothing for us to attain, nothing for us to be. God's union with man is complete.

But all this sounds far too easy, too good to be true. Our union with God cannot be quite so simple. Of course, Christians will say, individual people can be sanctified and transfigured: they can be adopted as children of God, they can dwell in God and he in them. But, at the end of the line there is always somebody wagging his finger and saying, never forget that God is God and you are nothing, that you may be made in the image of God but, in the last resort, you are as different from him as chalk is from cheese. Well, let such people remember those words of St. Athanasius: 'God became man that we might become God'. Let them also remember the words of Jesus who said 'He who loves his life will lose it and he who loses his life will find it'. You can, if you want, persist in clinging on to yourself, your personality, your individuality, insist that your own ego shall continue throughout eternity; but the question is, would you not rather die and have God's life in exchange for yours? After all, what can you want more than that? God became man so that his life might be ours. That seems to be what I am saying. But it is not quite true, not according to Charles Williams and Duns Scotus. They say that God became man so that our life might be his. It is an important distinction, for, the whole point of creation and of incarnation is that God made man so that God might be man; the fact that as a result of God's action man was made God is purely incidental - Holy Luck, Williams might have called it.

Of course, these two sides of the same coin were foreseen from all eternity: the coin is the coinherence (if I may be permitted an un-Williams-like pun) of man and God. God and man are at one; they are part of the same bundle; they are one spirit, one flesh, one body, - they can never be separated. God can no more escape from us than we from him. He is in union with every sinful creature here and now; and every sinful creature is on the Throne of Heaven. God has our warts and all; and we have his perfection. Holy Luck indeed!

I now want briefly to consider three matters in the light of this fact of

union: worship, liturgical language and intercession. Worship is not a means of achieving union with God; but is the expression of it. Worship is the enjoyment, the celebration of our union with God and of the already transfigured universe.

What then shall the forms of worship be? First, worship is corporate because union is not with one man only but with all mankind. Second it is a ritual: that it is to say it uses formal words because worship is not something we do towards God but which God does through us; the words are taken or derived from the Scriptures which tell the sacred story of the unbreakable bond between God and his creation. Third, it is a ceremony: that is to say that it uses formal actions because worship is not something done only with the mind but also with the body, for it is matter that matters - the glorious and holy flesh. Fourth, worship is play: not, that is to say, like serious drama but exactly like children's games. As St. Thomas Aquinas said, 'The movements in games are not contrived to serve another end but are pursued for their own sake. It is the same with the delights of wisdom'. If, however, we have no realisation of our union with God then worship will be ruined by artificial and self-conscious dramatics and by the intrusion of ministerial individualism. Public worship will be no different from the prayer of Miss Edna Rossiter. Miss Edna Rossiter is a character in a novel whose author and title have been erased from my memory: the opening sentence of the novel, however, is remembered verbatim:

'Edna Rossiter considered herself a very religious young woman, for she spent twenty minutes of every evening with her head buried in a pink eiderdown thinking about herself.'

If we are not aware of our union with God, that is what worship is. It makes us more aware of ourselves, more conscious of the division between the old gentleman in the sky and the not so gentle men and women on earth. It is a kind of religious chatter. On the one hand you have to get the words right: the ministers must be in the right places at the right time, they must turn at right angles and not diagonally, they must look solemn and holy: they must say the words distinctly and perform the ceremony beautifully and accurately; the people must stand and kneel and sit at appropriate times and must look reasonably attentive all the time. On the other hand the chatter is free and easy: it does not matter what you say so long as you are nice to your neighbours and smile at them: what Williams called the 'last horror of daily life'. It does not matter what you think so long as you use the latest jargon which passes for modern speech. The odd but marvellous thing is that either kind of monkey business is an expression of our union with God because, by the nature of things, it cannot be anything else.

That worship must submit to explicit and particular form is inevitable for creatures who are not pure spirit and whose thoughts and feelings are inseparable from 'the glorious and holy flesh'. Worship, thus, is what ever you are doing: the piece of furniture you are making, the field you are ploughing, the friend you are helping, the letter you are writing, the car you are driving, the coal you are mining, the talk you are not hearing, the dust-bins you are emptying, the symphony you are composing, the whiskey you are drinking, the drunkard you are restraining, the soap opera you are watching, the football you are playing. Everything you do is a delighted and disciplined expression of your awareness that the God who is spirit has made himself also flesh and blood and stone and water. God is: he is

being itself; and God does not create ex nihilo (from nothing) but, in creation, makes himself other than he is. The galaxies, the black holes, the spiders, the mice and the micro-organisms, all exist because God gives himself without limit in them. Only God is; and therefore every created thing hangs upon the eternal being of God.

God is one with us: we celebrate our union with God by participating in his life in this world. So, worship is not teaching, explanation, edification; but the re-presentation through symbols and actions and words of the sacred history. The meaning of the death of Christ, for example, is not found in the doctrine of the atonement but is known when we share in the broken bread, the weakness and desertion and treachery of friends, the fickleness of the crowd, the nails hammered into the hands, the thrust of the spear, the distress of a mother, the darkness at noon. The Paschal Vigil re-enacts the whole of Christian history from the beginning to the end. On that night we are present at the creation of light and darkness, of fire and water, of earth and air; we share the meaning of the seasons, of growth and of sex, of birth and death; we are present at the death and resurrection of Christ; we are in Egypt with ancient Israel and we are in the city of the heavenly Jerusalem. Christian worship requires not, as seems to be common practice, the reduction of the dramatic and symbolic elements but the enrichment of drama and symbol, not demythologising but remythologising. For Christian worship translates an external story into inward reality: it enables history to be perennially present so that it is no longer a story about the past and the future but is, at one and the same time, the moments of creation, redemption and resurrection. The external, conceptualised religion which Christianity has become is turned outside-in here, the pilgrimage from earth to heaven is not a journey into the future but a journey into the centre where God is already the beginning and the end, and where we are one with the living God.

What then about the language of prayer? Williams says:

'I have sometimes wondered why, when the ecclesiastical authorities need something written, they so rarely turn to anyone whose business is writing. I am not offering myself as a candidate, though since it is to be supposed that a bishop administers his diocese better than I possibly could, there would be no particular egotism in supposing that I might be able to write better than a bishop'.

(Image of the City p. 122)

Indeed he can; as his Collects composed for a Marriage show:

'Almighty and everlasting God, who from Thy eternity dost always direct the operations of Thy glory: Mercifully subdue Thy beauty to our understanding and with Thy bounty illumine our distress, through the intercession of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.'

'God, who by the teaching of holy doctors hast called us in all images and patterns to the unimaginable peace of goodwill: Grant that we may so study felicity with our minds that we may attain it in our lives: Who in the Triune Mystery art the perfect and only Godhead, Amen.'

Beauty and accuracy indicate the images that the words communicate. The trouble with most Christian theologians is that feelings are irrelevant

to the apprehension and communication of truth. So long as their words carry their argument they are content. Their language betrays their insensibility to the feelings which their words arouse. They are unconcerned with what we may call the aesthetic aspect of the image of God; and Williams has taught us the meaning of images from Adam to Beatrice. But most theologians do not realise that the form in which they try to communicate truth affects the truth itself. They do not understand, because they do not feel, that what is said includes how it is said: that the truth about God is expressed or distorted by words that are ugly or beautiful, banal or sublime.

Furthermore, Church architecture, furniture, decoration, hymns, music and extemporary prayers often evoke an inadequate and therefore false image of God. Usually they do little more than excite and exhibit man's wayward and capricious feelings about his relationship to God so that he does not worship God but worships the vague and undisciplined feelings aroused by the idea of worshipping God. And this is idolatry: 'it is a desire to retain the glory for oneself which means that one is not adoring the glory but only one's own relation to the glory'. (He Came Down From Heaven p. 80). The image of God created by some activities which bear the name of worship is so ugly and vulgar, flat and graceless, wearisome and boring that many people are repelled. Some are sickened by the adolescent sentimentality of the words and music of Victorian and mid-twentieth century hymns. Others find that the singing of Anglican chants and seventeenth century anthems turns their every nerve into a road of pain on which church choirs delight to trample. Some are offended by what they regard as the outdated and incomprehensible language of Cranmer. Others are appalled at the unimaginative and flat style of liturgical reformers (both Anglican and Roman) which sounds like the minutes of a meeting which the Committee's infinitely patient chairman (God) is obliged to read. Some are distressed by the image of a God who is so refined and superior, so pompous and unfriendly, so obviously well-educated. Others shudder from a God who seems matey, jolly and apparently so deaf that he can only hear very loud singing. It may well be that the true image of God is embodied in worship which is frankly popular; but, on the other hand, it may best be reflected in worship which is unashamedly elitist. What matters is that we realise that an image of God is created by every word and every deed; that God is dis-closed or disfigured by the twanging of an amplified guitar, the rich bellowing of an organ, the unadorned plainsong, the frugality or excess of the spoken word, the fullness or emptiness of silence. Certainly Christians must not let their hearts rule their heads; but they need to develop their neglected and undisciplined feelings so that their hearts unite to rule their lives.

It is of course true that man's response to God has received a huge range of emotional and intellectual expression. It stretches from the spacious grandeur and delicacy of York Minster to the functional frugality of a dual-purpose Church-social-club; from Tallis's elaborate forty-part Motet to Monk's complacent setting of Abide with Me; from the austere simplicity of a Latin collect to the almost formless effusion of extemporary prayer. Most Christians, however, do not know how to share in them. They react with the same Oh! and Ah! to a solo by a lovely looking choir-boy as to an enthusiastic sounding massed choir. Even if their tastes are unusually refined they are moved to the same awe by a

beautiful sculpture as by the presence of its ugly sculptor. Their brains will, on reflection insist on a distinction but their feelings cannot discriminate.

The Western Church is not without its liturgical delights. It has produced prayers, sermons, hymns and even theological statements of unsurpassed beauty. Yet lovely language has been accidental: an unimportant incident on the road to accurate dogma. For example, the modest elegance and touching simplicity with which Cranmer perfectly summarises the Gospel in the Prayer of Consecration - 'Almighty God, our Heavenly Father who of thy tender mercy didst give thine only Son Jesus Christ' - quickly become theological polemic, a hook on which to hang his heretics - 'who made there a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction'. For though the Church has assented intellectually to the idea of beauty as a property of God, its belief has scarcely affected its worship and life. With rare exceptions Christian worship suggests that God really is 'the Father Almighty sitting in immense dignity upon his throne, propounding a law of righteousness as rigid as the tablets of stone upon which it is engraved'.

Twentieth century liturgical reformers share the same emotions and therefore create the same image: he is 'God of power and might eternal God, the King of glory Father of majesty unbounded'. We are all, inevitably, the children of our forefathers who fashioned God in the idolatrous image of Egyptian, Persian and Roman Imperial rulers and 'gave unto God the attributes which belonged exclusively to Caesar'. Only mystics and poets, painters and musicians (often on the fringe of the Church) have been dazzled and ravished by the divine perfection and, in their works, have restored to the image of God the enchantment of which most theologians and liturgists have deprived him. Few ancient or modern prayers for public worship begin 'O beautiful God, O lord of endearing loveliness, our beloved you fill your lovers with delight, O you are fair our love'. To address God thus is to embarrass our undeveloped emotions of which our intellects are ashamed. Yet God, even the intellect must assert, is as adequately described as beautiful as he is portrayed as almighty, as gentle as majestic, as passionate as unmoved. He is as much the old bearded gentleman in the sky as he is the ground of being: he is both this and that, and neither this nor that. He is as beyond our powers of understanding as he is beyond our powers of feeling.

The Christian intellect wants to define and limit: therefore Christian worship is, with few exceptions, response to certain images of God which the intellect regards as somehow closer to reality than others. Thus, choosing a few and excluding many Old Testament images, Christian worship to a God who is believed to be King of kings and Lord of lords, as though these images were statements of fact. But we can equally well worship God as a pillar of fire, a cloud of smoke, a burning bush, a lion roaring after its prey, a husband grieving for his wife who has deserted him, a lover who allures his beloved. Similarly we worship not the God of the New Testament but a God idolised by certain intellectually acceptable images.

The Church behaves as though God were the heavenly Father and judge of all the world. These images are facts, so we seem to believe, whereas bread, water, wind and fire are mere metaphors. The intellect prefers abstractions or the more austere and remote images because they prevent

the reality of God from being felt too closely and too intimately. Hence, the creed of Christendom does not proclaim its belief in 'God, the husband, the lover: the adorable beauty of heaven and earth'. The creed's Kingdom is ruled by a grand and magnificent judge on a throne, not humbly served by a poor woman looking for a lost coin. The creed's Spirit unobtrusively proceeds and speaks: he does not erupt and burn. Worship has become response to what can be explained rather than what can be felt because what can be felt is too threatening and disturbing. Modern liturgical language follows the same, safe road. The heavenly Father becomes a homely Dad; but the emotions expressed and felt are familiar country: they do not lead the faithful into an unknown and unnerving region where, as Williams put it, divine and undivine nature are united in a 'carnality of joy' (He Came Down From Heaven, p.81).

Christianity maintains that we must love one another. It has always encouraged and indeed demanded, says Williams, a continual attention to the needs of our neighbour. We are to be men for others. We are to express concern, assist and sympathise. We are to pray for others. But can we do any of these things when there are two almost insoluble difficulties in our way? The first is the fact that though it may be true that 'no man is an island', that all man is one man, yet we are also separate and individual. The second is that we do not know what the will of God is for another person. Of course we assume we do, and there is something astonishingly self-confident about Christians who arrange a battery of intercessions for the sick, as though they know what God wants and as though a vast quantity of prayer will make God do what he apparently wants to do. If God's will is so certain then the prayer of one righteous man is enough.

But intercession is not an attempt to manipulate people, to alter their attitude, to change the course of events; because, to repeat, we have little knowledge of those for whom we pray and even less knowledge of the will of God. When we pray that a totalitarian government shall stop killing and torturing its enemies we feel on safe ground: surely that is a prayer in Christ's name. But what do we know of the persecutors and their victims? What do we know of the way in which God is drawing both murderers and the murdered to himself? A little more faith in God and a lot more doubt about the truth of their own convictions are necessary requirements for those who intercede in private and in public.

Williams took literally the words of St Paul that we are to bear one another's burdens. We are to take over the grief or the fear or the pain and suffer instead of the other. This is what is meant by Christian love. Jesus says exactly that: we are to love as he loved us; and he loved us by bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows. He substituted himself for us. And that is what we are to do. I can put myself in your place. I can carry your burdens of anxiety, and depression and resentment and sadness if I have the courage to do so, and you can carry mine if you have the energy to take them on. The first step does indeed require the exercise of our imagination. We have to begin with sympathy (empathy!) - to learn to feel exactly what another is feeling. And it is hard work and frightening. It requires at first tremendous attention and a good deal of time. But it is possible to overcome, through singleness of mind, those walls of the skulls that divide us. It is, after all, co-inherence, the union of man with man through their mutual union with God, which makes such substitution

possible.

St Anthony of Egypt: 'Your life and your death are with your neighbour'. And another: 'It is right for a man to take up the burdens of others, whoever they may be, and so to speak, put himself in the place of his neighbour; to become, if it were possible, a double man; he must suffer with him as if he put on his actual body, as if he had acquired his countenance and soul; he must suffer for him as he would for himself.' Williams was not devoid of humour about the doctrine. After a sociological conference he wrote:

' in the discussion that followed Our remarks, do you know what word appeared, though indeed we had not mentioned it? "Substitution"; yes, faith; and attributed to Us...

Mr Williams' idea(s) of substitution a necessary part ...
Mr Williams has in other places pointed out that substitution ...'
till a poor woman in the third row said suddenly and aloud:
'What is substitution? but there was no time to tell her'.

Nevertheless he tentatively practised the art.

' ... there is something I should like you to do for me. I am very much bothered about my people in London. My wife's pain and my son's nerves make it all very trying, but it is (I think) the pain I am chiefly concerned about. We all seem to slip lower and further into merely the thing happening, so to speak. Well, and so, I thought, on all our general principles, you being also in the state of endurance and tiredness that you are, I would ask you to offer me that state (no more, no extra but just that) and I will have it brought into touch with Michal on the chance - in the faith - perhaps more faith than chance - that it may be in the courtesy of the Omnipotence to let it be useful.

I think I have done nothing for so long because I did not think it quite decent to start making what looked like a personal gain out of the Company. But it now seems to me that a miracle of healing (if ... and so forth) should take precedence of my emotions. Also I am moved towards it by having set in motion a similar activity towards another. Well, I had not thought of the method before, but if it works this way!

If your suffering is otherwise prepromised, tell me. If not, I do not want you to do more than I define; to pass on to me by intention, in God, precisely the weariness, the grief, even the known endurance of 'envy' or what not. It does not require more effort than the recollection and purpose; the courtesy, I need not say, I know you have.'

Williams acknowledged that many people know an instinctive though intermittent practice of this art. It happens naturally, at moments, between husband and wife, lover and lover, friend and friend. But it can happen supernaturally between any men and women if only one of them has enough faith to take the burden. But, he emphasised, we must not be absurd or portentous, and take on things we know we cannot bear, or promise things we know we cannot do. We dare not take on the most dreadful diseases or even the toothache; but perhaps we can take over the extra burden of anxiety or fear. They will still have to face the illness - but at least they will be free of the worry about it. We can take over the sleeplessness or the inability to concentrate. The point is that it is best to begin with small things, and not to dream of taking on the world's suffering. All that is needed is the act of will.

There are as I have suggested, wrong, over-confident, self-centred ways of interceding. But it can never be wrong to kneel in the presence of God on another's behalf and in their stead; to be that man or woman as far as we know; to pray the Eucharist as them not ourselves; to pray that Christ may be for them and for us what he always is, the centre, source and goal of the coinherent life of matter and spirit: for he is the image of the union of all - God, man and everything."

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Members may be interested to read the recollections of C.W. of Joyce Taylor, now living in Probus, near Truro, Cornwall. She writes: "I attended a good many of C.W.'s English Poetry lectures at the City Literary Institute in the 1930s and remember him as looking just as his pictures show him. I do not remember his hands trembling, as they are said to have done. Evidently that did not register with me, being probably overshadowed by what he had to say and how he said it. He was gloriously enthusiastic, and very serious about getting us to understand just why he was so keen on a particular poet's work. After he had spoken of Gerard Manley Hopkins I said I still did not understand the poems and Charles Williams immediately made an appointment to meet me one lunch hour. He spent that time going over the poems and explaining the language to me, and ended by giving me a copy of the Gerard Manley Hopkins collected edition with C.W.'s introduction to it.

When talking on Keats, C.W. brought us a facsimile of the manuscript of St Agnes Eve and showed us, as he put it, 'What a job he had getting the girl undressed.' Charles Williams made such an impression on me with Milton's Paradise Lost that I've never forgotten the lines about Adam and Eve '... hand in hand ... their solitary way' because I can still hear him saying them; it seemed to be a passage that particularly appealed to him. One of his favourite phrases was mutatis mutandis, I remember, and it was he who introduced me, and some others who had not heard the word before, to the word 'Manichaeism'. Something I cannot forget is C.W.'s tone of voice when I said I had 'found' and bought one of his books: he replied in a tone of resigned disappointment, "Secondhand, I suppose". I felt so ashamed that I bought a brand new copy of Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind as soon as it was published! I do not remember Charles Williams ever saying 'Goodbye' or 'Good Night' - it was always, 'Go with God'."

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