

the individual and existentialist frustration

By DOUGLAS E. MacLEOD

Many of us have been subjected to the term "existentialism" at some time or another. Perhaps we understood its meaning, more than likely we have not. To understand existentialism, one could read many books on the subject, talk to many persons about it, but really be no further ahead. There is a great deal of truth to the saying that only a writer can truly understand another writer, and only an artist can truly appreciate the creativity of another artist. We have felt the twinges of creativity within ourselves, and we have all felt the frustration at not being able to give it a good expression; if any expression. When I say that only the artist really understands the artist, I mean it from the point of view of expression.

The artist who achieves acclaim for his writing, or music, or painting is in a certain sense a member of a breed apart. The ordinary man is somehow left out of the picture; he can only stand and admire, and sometimes wonder at the genius of the artist. But what of the artist himself. With whom does he communicate? If he cannot communicate with his fellow artists, then he must communicate with himself. Perhaps this helps to explain the enforced periods of isolation which sometimes is exhibited in the lives of artists? They have something to communicate, but to whom shall they tell it? Can they tell it at all?

Sometimes the creative man must retire and in solitude attempt to explain to himself what is happening within his own psyche before he can explain it to others. Sometimes no desire is felt to communicate with others. Would they understand? Would they care?

Someone has said that speech was given to us so that we could conceal our thoughts from others. How true that really is! We go through life creating an image of ourselves for others. We only reveal what we want others to know, and in the whole process we are building a self. It is a peculiar self, for its existence depends not on ourselves but on others. We allow so many opinions, so many of our ideas and our experiences to become the common knowledge of others. These opinions, ideas express only a certain part of us, but they are sufficient, for with them we create a self — a real self? Not by any means—it is a false self.

Douglas E. MacLeod has done this, and so have you. How I wish sometimes that we could reveal to others our true selves. There is really so much dishonesty and we have become trapped in it. It may be harmless, and probably is. It does, however, introduce a duality. A duality between what we are, and what others think we are. The novelist tries to make a union of this duality. He constructs a character in whom we see both aspects of a personality — the coward and the hero, the saint and the sinner, love and hate, truth and falsity, hope and despair. Perhaps that is why the novelist is such a great boon to mankind — he shows us as we really are. You may argue that the character of the novel does not exist, that he is a figment of the imagination. This is not true,

for in fiction lies the greatest truth.

Have you ever longed to be truly honest with someone? I have for a long time, but I've never made it. I wonder why — is it pride? I sometimes think it is, but at other times, I think it is something sacred. We live a life isolated from others. Not that we are physically or intellectually isolated, but that we are psychically isolated — we cannot really know or appreciate each other as we would want. This leads to a great deal of misunderstanding and jealousy, and envy and hatred: "I thought he said this," "I was sure he was that kind of man," "I don't know — sometimes I think he's a nut." In our daily life we make many misjudgments based on hearsay, instinct (not too reliable) and intellectual assumptions based on the others' "idiotic ideas." Prejudice, I am told, is built on ignorance, lack of information. How much information does he have? How many of us even know the students we may live and talk with everyday? This inability to know others, no matter how great our empathy, is a constant reality to some people. Constant in that it is always there, not constant in that it is thought about all the time. It is a present reality — an undeniable fact.

From this dilemma we can turn to the universe, to God, and back to the universe. From the simple experience of not knowing one's own brother, it is an easy matter to project this sense of unknowing to the chain of events that surround us, to our relationship to God, to our place in time and in eternity. There is thus created a whole, vast area where the inability to know really becomes profound. With this should come a great tolerance, a great humility, an appreciation for others and their ideas. It may come to the point where we can even say Krushov is a man who really does not know where he is going, who is misguided; who has been deceived; but can you blame him? Can you sit back and condemn him — "and there was no one to throw a stone."

For the Christian existentialist (if he is a Christian, and sometimes if he is not) finds it difficult to criticize, and criticism (the expression of an alive mind) sinks into the background to die a slow death. Does the existentialist then become passive? Not by any means. Now he listens more often, makes fewer dogmatic statements, and acquires a respect for the individual more profound than he has ever experienced before. How this comes about, the existentialist is not really sure; all he knows is that it is happening to him, and that it is changing him.

Wherein lies the frustration? Having acquired a new respect for the individual, he finds it difficult to condemn him or his actions. To the existentialist who has a creative bent, the problem is a very real one. He sees in the individual a wealth of experience — would writing a novel make it any more real; the existentialist sometimes doubts his ability to give meaning to life; to him life is a thing thrust upon him — he does not always understand it, it is too vast and he is caught up in it and does

TO BE OR NOT TO BE A LADY

There comes a time in each girl's life when she has to make that decision which will color and condition the rest of her existence. Childhood has vanished and the serious responsibilities of adulthood loom ahead. If she has been properly brought up by "proper" parents her decision has been made long before, and her task is merely to follow her conditioning, (salivate at the bell), and in general to conform completely to what others think she should be. Her future is secured. What of the others, unfortunately a minority, whose parents never extended their little fingers while sipping tea, or did any of "them" proper things? Is the girl who read Peter Pan instead of Little Women, and who glimpsed the artificiality of the adult world before childhood was ended lost forever in her rejection of this sham?

With almost universal advocacy of ladyhood, the decision to follow a path contrary to this is weighty but then, so is a decision contrary to conscience. The answer lies in the dichotomy between the letter and the spirit which results in two kinds of ladies -- those of the proper background and etiquette books and those of the spirit of truth. Since almost everyone's conception is formed under the delusion of the former, I will ignore the latter -- indeed a minority -- for now.

To be a lady in the former sense is to become proficient in carrying off a series of 'do not's', mainly concerned with 'do not do this,' or 'that', or anything else which may destroy the illusion. This state of ladyhood is usually presented as some ideal to follow -- for ideals appeal very strongly to the young.

not understand it. He does not know the meaning of "human progress," he really does not know where civilization is going or why it wants to get there — can he then write another **Brave New World?** Existentialists do write, but seldom pontificate. If he writes a satiric essay on society, it is because he loves the individuals that make it a reality. If he gives a pessimistic forecast of society's direction, it is because he sees the individual being swept up in something he cannot control, something that makes the individual a caricature, a puppet, rather than a man.

The existentialist is aware of all these things, but what can he do? Shall he condemn the sinner, praise the saint; smear society with his sarcasm and wit: become a champion of the poor and a consoler of the lonely; shall he rehabilitate the alcoholic, cure the dope addict; shall he rescue the prostitute, bury the dead, give strength to the living? What can he do? There you have one aspect of the existentialist personality, and there you have frustration. Not the kind the psychologist talks about, not the kind that leads always to anger; it, on the contrary, often leads to wonder, and sometimes to amusement. The existentialist is sometimes amused by his position; his frustration is so close to wonder that he does not know which is which. The existentialist weaves his experiences into a philosophy of life; sometimes I think it is more an attitude than a new philosophy. I hope this article has helped to give some idea of this important personality. Life is a great and wonderful gift; thinking about it does not make it any longer, but it can make it more precious.

dear bruno

Dear Bruno,
What's going on in the Red and White office? Rumors are going around that three of the editors have resigned—hope you will still be with us.

A. Fan

Dear Fan (I hope there are more of you).
Remember in my first letter I said that the paper was going to the dogs? Who's got a better chance of staying around than I?

* * * * *

Dear Bruno,
I've been thinking — (censored).
Hopeful.

* * * * *

Dear Bruno,
This is an expression, not a question. Rumor has it that you caused the food riot held before Christmas. Who ever had the idea, cannot fail to see the results. We all look a little more nourished now.

From 120 lbs. to 178 lbs. in two weeks.
Dear From 120 etc.,
Burrp !

One is the ideal of sitting with both feet on the floor; but this is a near impossibility, which like the primal tail has disappeared through disuse. It usually sets up a traumatic reaction in the knees which can only be cured by crossing them. Another ideal is never to betray what one really feels, because someone may discover the truth. Ladies also should not embarrass the situation by doing what they think is right if no one else is, but to go along with the majority, (there is no need to go into the possibilities this presents). In addition a lady dresses modestly and correctly at all times. At this point the Virgin Mary is usually brought in as an example. The reason is quite a mystery since she is presumably wearing the clothes of the times in which she lived.

In the foregoing respect, Mary is being put in the wrong category for she embodies the example of what a lady, a true lady is. To assign to her the foolishness of social degree and stuffy etiquette is to degrade her. What made her a lady and distinguishes any lady is simply, guts. She had the courage to do what she believed in wherever she was, and no matter what everyone else was doing. She was not the feeble Mother MacCree of the movies, or the floating mystic of some religious paintings, but an alive and dynamic force. When God asked her to be the mother of His Son her first reaction was not, "What will the neighbors think?" She submitted her will to God, not by weakening it in submission to everyone's dictates, but by standing firmly on her own two feet. She gave to God a will of forged steel, bent only to His will, not a damp rag at the disposal of anyone. By her strength of character and courage she gave everyone the secret of what it is to be a lady—even to a "Peter Pan."

VATICAN II

It is fantastically surprising to find the number of literate people who call themselves Catholics and yet know so little about the Catholic Church. Perhaps you are one of those unfortunates. Then consider the state of those who are illiterate. How much more depraved they are since they are unable to acquire unknowns from the numerous books, pamphlets, and articles written to explain. Most of these people depend upon what they hear from the pulpit once a week, and often they return to their homes little better off than they were before. True, they can be, and most likely are, good Catholics practicing a sincere, simple, devoted religion and unaware of the deep spirit of a living Christianity. We cannot evade the fact that Church doctrine has been ill-presented for some time, and this has been no contribution in alleviating degeneracy from the world of lax Catholics. The Church is in a sad state or, optimistically, has been so. Pope John XXIII has recognized this position and has made a decisive step toward correction. **Deo Gratias!** with all sincerity. Against the wishes of some prominent Church politicians Pope John called a Church, Vatican II.

Certain of those closely aligned with Church teaching and reform feel pessimistic since the comparative short session of the Council did not make radical changes that were hoped for. Nothing was proclaimed! The Mass has not returned to the vernacular! The Liberals have done nothing for improvement! The conservatives are in the improvement! The conservatives are in the lead! **Semper idem!!**

Good lord! How much do you expect from the start? Surely, all is not going to be accomplished in one sitting. Without all the official frills, a great deal has happened at Rome which has been overlooked by the mad populace. What do you think will happen when over two thousand Bishops who are human, convene at a Council? Sociability would bring them together. Were I a Bishop, I would, no doubt, converse with those who spoke my language and make it a point to evaluate the prosperity of my diocese with others. And there would be as many ideas on Church government, creed, and practice as there would be Bishops. With views and individual accomplishments passing from one to another, encouragement of shame would penetrate minds. They might even think, question their pastoral achievements, and consider a few alternations or practices for future actuality.

Pope John seems elated at the outcome of Vatican II even at its present check-mate, and he has reason to be, for although some time will elapse before further formal discussion resumes, wheels are turning, and thought is given to matter. Both liberals and conservatives have made their mark. Let the mills grind and the process take its course.

Moses Vaughn

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