

April 12, 1945
Germany

Dearest,

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The last three days have been very spring-like; it has been actually hot in the operating room. Today we finished our 90th case since joining this outfit; which, you will agree, is not bad for 6 days work. I am ready now for a few days' lay-off, to sleep up a bit and have a little relaxation.

Your letter telling of your feelings toward the Church I don't have with me, but I think I can remember well enough what you said. Basically, it seems to me, you find merit for yourself in its activity on two counts. First, and less important, is the humanitarian aspect. The various denominational churches are all more or less on the side of peace, of tolerance, of charity toward others, of unselfishness. Many do great deeds in the actual dispensing of practical and concrete humanitarianism. These things you believe in and approve of, and to them you are glad to be a party. Secondly, and more important, you have found in the Church a personal religious satisfaction; for you, it offers an acceptable interpretation between you and God. And this is wonderful to have. If the yearnings of a man's soul, the awesome feeling of insignificance, the awareness of greater divine powers than himself find satisfaction, or more rarely ecstatic fervor, in the services of any Church, that man is fortunate indeed. And so, if you have found these things to be real for you, I am happy for you, and a bit jealous.

For myself, it has been different. On point number one, I am in hearty agreement. In general, the Churches have been a strong force for good, particularly in recent years. One must remember that this has not always been true; nor is it universal today. Think back on some of the events of history; think of the despotism of the Catholic Church throughout the Middle Ages. By assuming a monopoly on education, they imposed the dark blanket of spiritual and physical serfdom on all of Europe for a 1000 years. The "Dark Ages" might be called the "Age of Catholicism" - when heretics and witches were tortured and burned, when men's minds and souls were imprisoned in the chains of inflexible dogma, when only the clergy and their secular counterpart, the nobility, had shares in the world's goods. Think of the fury and inhumanity of the Religious Wars, which razed Europe for a hundred years. Think of the intolerance and persecution in the Protestant Church which led to the founding of America as a refuge of the spiritually repressed. Think of the secular history of the Medici's; of the Spanish Church, Inquisition to Mission; of the Protestant Militants in our own country (Ku Klux, etc.); even of the present situation in the region of Quebec, where disease, illiteracy, and poverty surround the tremendous Cathedral and all it stands for. No, the history of the Church is often pretty sordid reading. But, there is much on the good side. As the Churches

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have lost their secular power, they have had to rely more and more on the practice of the Christian humanity they preach. It is this practice which you find it good to be a part of, and with which I too am strongly in accord.

As for point number two, I am at a loss. I find no particular relation between the Church formalities, and a religious approach to God. The pomp, dogma, and hypnotism of the Catholic Church repel me. The awesome beauty and solemnity of their Cathedrals appeal. It is an architectural Church only. The Protestant Churches in various forms, offer me more of a real and understandable appeal. But I can find no union with the spiritual world of God through them because I don't believe in their basic postulates either. No one would accuse me of being particularly religious; but I am not agnostic, nor do I do lip service for appearances, and I am more tolerant than most of any man's creed. I believe there is a God, a divine spirit beyond and above human endeavor or comprehension. I cannot visualize him in the form of a man; I cannot find him personally interested in any one being, human or otherwise. Dick Boelkins used to like to preach to me. He was a member of the Dutch Reform Church, a staunch churchman. He would recite their credo, or catechism, and never fumble a word. "I believe in the Trinity, in God the Father, God the Son, & God the Holy Ghost, etc., etc." I used to listen carefully, and when he got all through, I found that he hadn't made one statement in which I did believe. I don't believe in the immaculate conception; I don't believe Jesus was the Son of God or that he was or is divine; I don't believe in miracles with a divine moral. To me, all this, which to him seemed so sure and satisfying and righteous, was just so much mumbo-jumbo. The identification of the Church with any real religious satisfaction or appeal has ever escaped me. To me, the Church and Religion are two relatively unrelated phenomena.

So, I suppose, I am a poor Christian, or perhaps, not a Christian at all. But, although I don't believe in some of the theories of the divinity of Christ himself, I do believe in his teachings. He, to me, was a man of extraordinary humanity and depth of feeling, who, in the humility of spiritual awareness, devised and taught and lived a morality which is without peer in this world of men. In the teachings of Christ I believe, for they are basically a confirmation of the integrity and value of the individual; and although the reward of a world hereafter and the favor of the Lord, is often the spur to action, the actual gospel is the reiteration of the social and humane characteristics of mankind. Perhaps, I'm not such a bad Christian after all.

And as for God, where do I find him? I find him in the laws of order and chance, in the wonders of life, in the intricacies of our special and temporal world. I find him in the strange empty wonderings

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of the soul, not as answers, but as questions. I find him in the mountains, in the quiet sunset, in the rustling pines and murmuring stream. I find him in the contemplation of deep and binding human relationships, such as yours & mine. But he cannot be pictured, he needs no altar, and many a sparrow falleth that he cares not a fig about, nor of which perhaps, is he even aware. For "he" is not a being, but a power and a spirit which I have almost never found in Church, as the people who work there distract me.

So now you know. Do you think that you are married to an atheist?

G'night sweet,

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