

RURAL SYNTHESIS

THE RELIGIOUS BASIS OF
RURAL CULTURE

MARTIN THORNTON

AUTHORIZED REISSUE



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CONTENTS

- Foreword
- Preface
- 1 Introduction
- 2 The Meaning of “The Land”
- 3 “The Land” in Poetry
- 4 The Agricultural Ethic
- 5 The Prophetic Element in Agriculture
- 6 The Church in Rural Economy
- 7 The Theology of Rural Synthesis
- 8 The Rural Personality
- 9 Pastoralia
- 10 The Rural Liturgy
- 11 Rural Synthesis and the Modern World
- 12 Conclusion

FOREWORD

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“Nature’s a rum ‘un,” said Mr Squeers, and few have questioned the truth and profundity of his remark. Mr Thornton’s book is about one part or aspect of this strange, fascinating and awesome creature of God; it is about the Nature which by Man’s tendance becomes “The Land,” and so the means by which God wills to give us all our daily bread. The author is singularly well-equipped for his task. In former years he farmed his own hereditary acres, today he is an Anglican priest and a trained theologian. The reader will find himself embarked upon a sustained argument in which an intimate acquaintance with rural life is skillfully combined with a scholarly knowledge of Christian Doctrine to demonstrate the essentially sacramental nature of “The Land.” The book is the product of direct experience and hard thinking and entirely avoids the snare of pseudo-Wordsworthian gush. Indeed, the author unconsciously provides the strongest proof of his thesis in revealing the depth and spiritual quality of his own mind.

PREFACE

If we compare the world of today with the great ages of the past, we are immediately forced to the conclusion that their respective pros and cons are so intertwined that such a comparison tends to become rather pointless. The Good Old Days were not particularly good and the Bad Old Days were not particularly bad. Yet the application of the adjective “great” is not quite meaningless.

The paradox will be complete to the modern mind when it is realized that those ages or civilizations which seem to justify this description (as for example, the European culture of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, or the flowering of the English Renaissance under Elizabeth) were dominated by “religion” while their sense of social justice, morality, democratic freedom, and what we would call “standard of living” was vastly inferior to the ethical ideals of our own times. But this paradox is only valid if we interpret “religion” according to the current fashion, which insists on putting the second Christian commandment first, and the first nowhere at all; which so stresses Jesus-The-Teacher that it eliminates Jesus-The-Christ.

The human being, alone among God’s creatures, can ask the question “Why?” It is, moreover, instinctive and vital that he should ask it, and the question fairly faced

must inevitably lead beyond the temporal good to the Eternal God, to the purposeful reality, the ultimate goal. To whatever Utopian heights we may reach in temporal virtue and social justice, human life remains empty and meaningless if we discard the idea of eternity, not as everlasting time, but as the elimination of time—the Eternal Now.

But there are two primary forces which, despite human progress and regress, are common to all ages, including our own. We have the Spirit of God, dwelling within the Christian Church, and ministering to the human urge toward eternal salvation; and the force of Fertility, by which all worldly life is created and sustained. The Church and Sacraments may be regarded as the extension, in time and space, of the Incarnation and Crucifixion of the Son. Soil Fertility may be similarly regarded as the extension of the Creation of the Father. But the Father and the Son is One God and the fact that both of these forces spring from the eternal purpose of a common Creator, a purpose behind an indissoluble and integrated synthesis, would suggest that there is some primary connection between them.

Today the respective parties to this synthesis are subject to struggle, disagreement, and schism within themselves. The various sects, denominations, and parties which come under the very general heading of “Christianity” are no greater in number than the various

schools of thought in the spheres of Rural Economy and Agriculture. We still find disciples of Wordsworth who found whole wonderful worlds in a single wild blossom; and of Johnson, to whom “one green field is after all, very like another.” There are those who would wish a completely mechanized, commercial, agriculture; while some, despairing at the sight of a single tractor, look wistfully to the days of the bewhiskered and be smocked. Wealthy men would spend their lives in maintaining their village’s Tudor integrity whilst its inhabitants shriek for electric light and omnibuses. Practical farmers join together against the encroachments of agricultural scientists who disagree among themselves.

In the middle of it all stand the village churches, vying with one another on matters of liturgical theology which are quite irrelevant to their environment, or attempting schemes of social organization which are equally irrelevant to their mission.

A return to the idea of an integral synthesis, of an eternal purpose, would suggest that some fresh light might conceivably be thrown upon the respective problems of these two spheres if they were brought together again and compared side by side. We would emphasize the word “compare,” for it must be remembered that we are dealing with ultimate things, with categorical orthodoxies over which we have no control. Fertility is a perpetual and integral part of the

original creation; the Christian religious is not primarily a code of moral behavior or social ethics, but a body of doctrine spring from the supreme revelation of ultimate truth by that same Creator. Both are grounded upon facts, not on theories which can be basically altered, or “adapted,” in the sense which means “watered down” or fundamentally changed to fit in with the temporary whims of a finite human society. We can only “compare” and attempt to find out whether or not they are, in fact, “adapted,” whether they are essentially coincident or antagonistic in principle, and if any relevance can be found between them, then the particular problems which both are not facing may appear to be a little less difficult.

Our purpose, therefore, is not so much to take sides with any particular school of rural thought or theological scholarship, but rather to introduce them and, if possible, arrange a marriage. We would embark upon the eternal quest for truth by trying to supply some kind of common anchor for two academic balloons, both of which are inclined to fly gaily over the heads of their respective *laities*.

In modern theological circles, for example, there is a tangle of conflicting opinion about “religious experience.” The teachings of Dr Rudolf Otto are commonly regarded as “dangerous”; few would care to accept all he says without reservation, yet few would categorically reject it. For the purposes of this little study

we make full use of Dr Otto's work without hesitation; not because the academic fashion supports him, nor because we are particularly attracted, but because it tends to be supported by the *facts* of rural life.

Similarly, we oppose the agricultural school which seeks a return to the rule of "natural order"; not that we are particularly repelled by the idea, but because it seems to be quite incompatible with the orthodox doctrines of Christianity.

Thus the object of this particular study may be summed up in those familiar phrases which we so often read, or hear, in the concluding lines of rural books, articles, and addresses. On such occasions we are informed, amid polite applause, that ... "the material *and* spiritual welfare of humanity is rooted in the soil," or, "the land is the basis of *all* human development." "The farmer (and/or farm-worker) is the backbone, the very life-blood, of all civilization," etc., etc. This sentiment forms an extremely effective oratorical flourish, an uplifting literary finale; but does it really mean anything? If it means nothing in particular, as the polite applause would imply, then it is a perfectly justifiable piece of professional rhetoric; but if it is a true statement of fact, then we are faced with a truth of the most profound significance to all generations and to our own in particular. We are confronted with a truth that raises a most formidable host of theological, political, and

agricultural questions; which can only be examined by the leading scholars and technicians within these spheres.

This very short volume evolves from a personal belief that the sentiments to which we have alluded, though usually expressed in the rather distorted manner pertinent to the grinding of some particular axe, are not entirely false.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

After a long and rather wearisome journey modern psychologists have found some general agreement with the Old Testament conception of man. In essence he is material “flesh,” placed higher than the rest of creation by possession of a rational mind and imbued with the “breath” or “spirit” of life; “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” Yet in spite of other varied and intricate complexities, he remains an indivisible unity—a “soul” or “being” or “personality.”

Professor Laidlaw (*The Biblical Doctrine of Man*) warns us that:

Nothing can be more misleading than to identify “Soul” here with what it means in modern speech, or even in later biblical language. “A living soul” is here exactly equivalent to “a creature endowed with life,” for the expression in these creation narratives (Genesis) is used of man and the lower animals in common. “Soul” in the primitive Scripture usage means not the “immaterial rational principle” of philosophers, but simply life embodied. So that in this primal

text the unity of the created product is emphatically expressed, and the sufficient interpretation of the passage is that the Divine inspiration awakes the already kneaded clay into a living human being.

By “personality” therefore, we mean personality which is created by God, which has fallen, and which is restored by Christ.

This primary fact is also established by the evidence of history, for it has been borne out in practice by the world’s great civilizations. The ancient Egyptian and Syriac civilizations could not neglect that essential unity of man which includes a religious faculty; even the practical Romans had to supply a “State religion,” while to the Israelites, religion, politics, legal administration, art, literature and agriculture were so interdependent as to be virtually one and the same thing; the wholeness of “life,” that is “life embodied” and life lived.

We may speak of Isaiah and Jeremiah as “statesmen”; Amos the herdsman, and Micah the villager, were concerned with the social and economic injustices of their environment; but they were all essentially “prophets”—their life, work, and outlook centred around communion with God, the hearing and expounding of His Word. Politics and sociology as such were but means to an end—an ultimate end.

The same applies to the great civilizations which followed, culminating in eleventh-century Europe. The social and political history of these times is bound up with divergent interpretations of some kind of religion. Religion, bodily toil, and intellectual activity were coincidental. The long period of the Renaissance saw the beginning of a gradual divorcement between the religious and the secular, and yet the Church continued to play a major part in European affairs until the time of the industrial revolution, when Church and State, Church and Art, Church and Industry all gradually began to drift apart until we arrive at the modern conception of “religion” on the one hand, quite independent and divorced from “life” on the other.

But this state of affairs is quite incompatible with the admitted conception of man as a unified personality whose physical faculties, mental powers, instincts, emotions, and spirituality are all mutually interdependent. Man is not a beast while he is having his dinner and a bodiless mind when he is reading a book; nor is he a purely spiritual “breath” in Church on Sunday and something else during the week. He is a man all the time—a unified being whose physical, mental, and spiritual powers all demand exercise and satisfaction.

We cannot disregard the hungers of body and mind, nor can we neglect the hungers of the spirit—that

primitive urge towards the supernatural. Mankind can never be entirely satisfied with the material and worldly, and if the modern man will not or cannot submit to the discipline of any organized religion, then he must continually suppress his instinctive hunger. If he cannot pray to God, he must at least escape from the temporal humdrum; if he cannot give himself to God in worship, he must lose himself in some escapist orgy of the cinema, or by alcohol, or in some other irrational exaggeration connected with sport or pleasure. Life dissociated from all idea of eternity becomes purposeless. The question “Why?” must be faced. Such life is technically sinful because it is incomplete. The fullness of life is never attained because an essential feature of personality is thwarted.

According to Professor H. Maurice Relton:

the human personality demands for its development and satisfaction an “environment which embraces not only the visible, but also the invisible world; not only finite ‘persons’ and ‘things,’ but also the infinite and invisible God.”¹ . . . “The testimony of religious consciousness confirms its reception of phenomena from the immaterial, invisible world. Through what channel or channels such phenomena reach us matters but little, so long as we recognize the fact that they are received and minister to man’s spiritual growth.”²

1. *A Study in Christology*, 159.

2. *Ibid.*, 158.

In other words, fundamental man demands an “environment” which modern man is denied. For the dominant environment of the modern world is industrial suburbia, commercial townships and the whole world of financial competition, which consist of little *but* the finite and visible. The modern industrial outlook on work is wholly material, while industrial man only contacts the spiritual in connection with birth, love, and death. Modern society is now doing its best to eliminate the first two of these.

But if the question of environment is of such consequence, and if it can be qualified by “spiritual” and “material” and “good” and “bad,” how can we speak of God’s omnipresence? If He is everywhere and if He is Spirit, how can we distinguish between environments of differing qualities? If we refer to Dr Rudolf Otto’s conception of the “Numinous,” the environmental atmosphere created by the presence of God and made *available* to human sensibility, we may speak of the “localized” presence without contradicting the doctrine of omnipresence. The significant word is *available*, which does not qualify the presence or omnipresence of God but rather stresses the fallibility of man, who can remain oblivious of God’s presence as a cabbage plant can hunger after nitrogen while it is surrounded by granules of ammonium sulphate; a nitrogenous salt which only becomes available as plant nutriment in the presence of moisture and lime: that is under favourable conditions of “environment.”

It is true that God *is* omnipresent and communion with Him is possible to the saint in all places and under all conditions, but the greater majority of mankind do not happen to be saints, and their subservience to environmental circumstance is undeniable. To suggest that prayer is as easily achieved in a crowded railway carriage as in a consecrated church is ridiculous; Almighty God is eternally speaking but man cannot always hear.

The perception of the Numinous, however, like all religious phenomena, is beyond the range of human understanding and must finally remain an incomprehensible mystery of an infinite God. But experience, supported by the sacramental teaching of the Christian Church, gives us at least some clue towards a practical differentiation between favourable (Numinous) and unfavourable environment. Throughout the ages such experience has been connected in some way with certain buildings or cities; it has been associated with painting and poetry, with music and quietness. One might hope to perceive the Numinous Presence within the precincts of a Gothic cathedral or in the cloisters of some ancient university or in some city-cradle of our civilization; perhaps in an English village or within the atmosphere of a certain family circle; but seldom in a factory, or a cinema, or a fish shop.

We have been warned that the Numinous conception may be justifiably regarded as *dangerous*, in so far as it points towards sentimental subjectivism. Here we suggest that the conception, as illustrative of the specific

problems in hand, is always to be balanced by the Christian doctrines of Divine transcendence and justification by faith alone. The Numinous experience can never be created, nor even sought, by man. It is entirely the action of God—something, that is, which God does to and for men; and never something to which man can aspire by his own efforts.

We cannot set out to attain Numinous experience, nor to create Numinous environment. We can but aim hopefully at eternal life through faith in Christ by the Grace of God. We can but offer our work to God, who can accept or reject it as He pleases; if He accepts it and condescends to speak to us through our experiences of this life, then we can only give thanks: if God does not offer us the comfort of such experience, then we can do nothing but continue to give thanks. Numinous experience is no practical guide to prayer, no short cut to mysticism; but an explanation of what does sometimes happen;—of what *is* or *is not*: and which is always beyond our control.

No adequate idea of the Numinous conception can be achieved without some comprehensive study of Dr Otto's own work, but perhaps our immediate purpose may be served by reference to his observations upon these relevant aspects: "The mode of expression, by way of 'grandeur' or 'sublimity,' which is found on higher levels, where it replaces mere 'terror' and 'dread'" (*The Idea of the Holy*, 65).

On the Arts generally, he says:

In the arts nearly everywhere the most effecting means of representing the numinous is “the sublime.” This is especially true of architecture, in which it would appear to have first been realized. . . .

To us in the West the Gothic appears as the most numinous of all types of art. This is due in the first place to its sublimity; but Worringer in his work *Probleme der Gothik* has done a real service in showing that the peculiar impressiveness of Gothic does not consist in its sublimity alone, but draws upon a strain inherited from primitive magic, of which he tries to show the historical derivation. To Worringer, then, the impression Gothic makes is one of magic; and whatever may be said of his historical account of the matter, it is certain that in this at least he is on the right track. Gothic *does* instill a spell that is more than the effect of sublimity. But “magic” is too low a word: the tower of the Cathedral of Ulm is emphatically not “magical,” it is *numinous*. . . . (*Op. cit.*, pp. 68, 70)

But in neither the sublime nor the magical, effective as they are, has art more than an indirect means of representing the numinous. Of directer methods our Western art has only two, and they are in a noteworthy way *negative*, viz. *darkness* and *silence*. The darkness must be such as in enhanced and made all the more perceptible

by contrast with some last vestige of brightness, which it is, as it were, on the point of extinguishing; hence the “mystical” effect begins with semi-darkness. Its impression is rendered complete if the factor of the “sublime” comes to unite with and supplement it. The semi-darkness that glimmers in vaulted halls, or beneath the branches of a lofty forest glade, strangely quickened and stirred by the mysterious play of half-lights, has always spoken eloquently to the soul, and the builders of temples, mosques, and churches have made full use of it.

The “noteworthy negative” of *silence* is perhaps best illustrated by Dr Otto’s remarks on the Numinous in Music:

Even the most consummate Mass-music can only give utterance to the holiest, most numinous moment in the Mass . . . by sinking into stillness: no mere momentary pause, but an absolute cessation of sound long enough for us to “hear the Silence” itself; and no devotional moment in the whole Mass approximates in impressiveness to this “keeping silence before the Lord.”

Or on the Bach B minor Mass he writes:

Its most mystical portion is the “Incarnatus” in the Credo, and there the effect is due to the faith, whispering, lingering sequence in the fugue structure, dying away pianissimo.

In a painting, Dr Otto traces the Numinous through a similar stage of preliminary “magical” element:

The Art of China, Japan, and Tibet, whose specific character has been determined by Taoism and Buddhism, surpasses all others in the unusual richness and depth of such impressions of the “magical,” and even an inexpert observer responds to them readily. . . .

Beyond dispute art has here a means of creating a unique impression—that of the magical—apart from and independent of reflection. Now the magical is nothing but a suppressed and dimmed form of the numinous, a crude form of it which great art purifies and ennobles. In great art the point is reached at which we may no longer speak of the “magical,” but rather are confronted with the numinous itself, with all its impelling motive power, transcending reason, expressed in sweeping lines and rhythm. In no art, perhaps, is that more fully realized than in the great landscape painting and religious painting of China in the classical period of the T’ang and Sung dynasties” (*Op. cit.*, p. 69).

But perhaps the greatest example of numinous experience, and one to which Dr Otto makes frequent reference, is contained in Isaiah's own account of his prophetic call. The sixth chapter of our authorized version gives us a sublime translation—the opening verses give expression to the deepest Numinous tone:

In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.

And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

Here we will but mention in passing the very obvious connection between such religious experience and those particular expressions; Art, Architecture, Music, Poetry, and Cloistered quiet, which are vaguely and rather naïvely referred to under the general heading of "Culture."

The rekindling of man's fundamental desire for spiritual development, the rebirth of some conception of eternal values—of that adventurous quest for the fullest development of personality as restored by God—which could bring about the adaptation or reunion of religion and “life,” presents the modern world with what is perhaps its greatest problem. And it is the apparent absence of the “cultural” which makes this problem so great a failure. Man demands an environment which under typical modern conditions he is unable to create, for such “culture” can only spring from that wholeness, or “holiness,” of personality, which in turn can only flourish within a “cultural” environment.

But it is personality which must act as the prime mover within this cultural spiral, because personality, or “soul,” is the prime instrument of God's Grace. It is personality which first creates and is then sustained by environmental forces, and it is that holiness of personal being with which the Christian religion is preeminently concerned. Christianity is all-embracing, it points not only to the temporal ethic but far beyond to the eternal goal. The so-called “Christian ethic,” divorced from the fullness of the Christian religion, becomes a means to a non-existent end. Yet both Church and State, faced with this modern paradox, are inclining more and more towards practical, social morality—divorced from, and displacing, true spiritual progress. No distinction is being drawn between “that sufficient environment” in Dr Relton's sense and “surroundings” or “conditions” in the purely material sense.

Let us by all means improve social conditions, let us use all possible power to eradicate the industrial slum, but let us not fall into the error of sentimentality, which grants to the Garden City qualities which it does not possess—airy little villas and flower gardens are in themselves “decent surroundings,” only the fullness of personality given and used by God can make them into that environment which man demands for his fullest development.

The modern Church is faced with two alternatives. Either it can yield to the prevailing mood and pander to the demand for a purely temporal and material code of social morality to which some shadow of its real “religion” is appended, or it can continue its twenty-centuries-old battle for its vital integrity against extremely heavy odds. The success of the former course is radically impossible if we accept that *unity* of human being upon which both the compilers of Genesis and our contemporary psychologists agree.

The latter course presents a startling similarity between the position of Christianity in the world today and the struggles of Judaism twenty-eight centuries ago. A similar solution, moreover, suggests itself. Now, as then, our hope lies not in the precarious security of international alliance, neither in material schemes for social improvement nor even in mass exhibitions of religious emotion, but in a spiritual, creative power, emanating from some modern equivalent of Isaiah’s “Faithful Remnant.” But can we find such a modern Remnant? Or is there any sphere within the modern

world wherein the fullness of personality might be nurtured?—which remains fundamentally free from those modern encroachments which are so truly, if subconsciously spoken of as soul-destroying?

In England the Church labours with varying degree of energy, sincerity, and orthodoxy; but its thought and policy are so absorbed with the industrial suburban sphere that it appears oblivious of any other. It is like a farmer who labours so valiantly to produce at least some moral growth from the stony ground that he neglects the true grain on his good land. His bad fields show some superficial signs of improvement after vast schemes which absorb all his capital and labour, while the fertile fields become derelict through lack of tillage. The analogy may be aptly expanded, for the farmer and the Church as a whole are both concerned with several “fields,” each with its own characteristics which demand individual treatment.

Our conception of the modern Remnant achieves a two-fold significance. Let us by all means tackle the great stony field of industrial suburbia, but by concentrating our best energies upon one little patch at a time let us increase our true grain little by little rather than produce vast quantities of unwanted and useless tares from the whole area. We must not spend all our time in forcibly hoisting the unwilling masses on to the first shaky rung of the ladder and neglect the faithful few who are half-way up and crying out for help.

But secondly we must consider the less impressive spheres within the world as we find it, we must look for

more basically fertile soil, and should our search be successful our only aim can be the creation and protection of an integrated “cultural” whole, a complete environment which could itself constitute a creative Remnant, capable of leading the world back to a great age.

Our own country is very typical of this modern world, but it is not yet one complete, homogenous industrial suburb; it still contains a “countryside”—that environmental entity known by such phrases as “rural England” or “the country” or “the rural sphere”—an environment which has become a civilization in itself; which has been created and is sustained by agriculture. For the sake of convenience we will refer to this environment by the simple phrase: “The Land.”

Now The Land is seen in many varied lights, yet it is usually conceived, be it vaguely, as an attractive sphere, a pleasant land that has some hidden meaning, as “atmosphere,” a “real value”; people visit The Land for itself alone.

But can we justify any claim that The Land constitutes that “environment,” that it is in fact such a “channel” to which Dr Relton refers? Does the environment of The Land contain “not only finite ‘persons’ and ‘things,’ but also an infinite and invisible God”? Does it “embrace not only the visible, but also the invisible world”? Is it favourable and inspiring to the perception of Numinous experience?

If such a claim can be made for it, then the rural Church has an obvious duty to perform; a real mission:

to fulfill its essential spiritual function within an integral scheme of things, rather than to depart from its vital lifeline of traditional dogma in order to superimpose itself upon a material environment in which it has no positive place. If The Land is, in essence, or if it could become, that sufficient, integral, and purposeful environment which “the human personality demands for its development and satisfaction,” then it could not have evolved from, nor can it be maintained by, anything less than that complete, unified personality which demands an eternal goal. A supernatural, rather than ethical, religion; a God who is immanent *and* transcendent.

Is there any fundamental similarity between The Land and the great civilizations (or “civilized environments”) of the past; as against the “modern world” as we commonly know it? Such a comparison gives our modern industrial civilization an unquestioned supremacy in matters of temporal value; in social morality, political justice, and “standard of living”; yet we would appear to have lost that essential demand for the eternal, the predominant sense of an overriding *purpose*. In spite of (certainly not because of) its tremendous strides in scientific and mechanical progress the industrial world of today has failed to achieve that sense of reality—of the sublime, as did twelfth-century European culture; that sense of the sublime expressed in Gothic architecture and expressed again in the traditional patchwork of an English pastoral.

Here we will be mention that both The Land and, for example, the cathedral of Chartres are the creations and

expressions of the illiterate and the “backward,” according to modern standards.

It is this real sense of the eternal, this human quest for the ultimate goal, that underlies the religion of the Mediaeval culture and which is so vividly conveyed by the phrase “Mediaeval Synthesis.” Can we, therefore, postulate *The Land* as a “Rural Synthesis”? Can we knit together its religion, work, pleasures, and society into an integrated and purposeful whole? Both *The Land* and the cathedral are works of genius, but let us not forget that genius entails, amongst other things, monotonous toil. We must not be carried off to those fanciful fields of Elysian bliss, which so much modern presentation of the farming life (and the Mediaeval life) suggests. It cannot be seriously asserted that topping sugar-beet and carting muck, hour after hour, day after day, is anything very exciting or even comfortable. Yet nor presumably is chipping great stones into rectangular blocks, for years on end. But such work is concerted with worthy purpose, it does lead by faith towards an eternal goal. It is not the same soulless boredom as the everlasting pressing of buttons.

We have already seen that *The Land* today is beset by many complex problems. These are now being attacked, rather fashionably, by a superabundance of “planners”; they are being approached from all angles, by agriculturists, rural economists, sociologists, journalists, practical farmers, politicians of all colours and sentimentalists of variable mood. All have some sincere contribution to make, and we find among them the

constant and pronounced idea that they are dealing with a reality of more than material significance. But they are all inclining towards the tendencies of the times which seek the solution of its problems upon a basis of politics or science or economics, or ethical humanism—*alone*. They are all approaching an admitted reality with but the very slightest reference to the Ultimate Reality—God.

The Tower of Babel is being rebuilt with alarming regularity.

But if The Land is in fact a Rural Synthesis, if it is a purposeful and integrated whole, then its fundamental problems should not be entirely irrelevant to Christian theology, which is not necessarily some obtuse academic exercise but a logical study of ultimate truth. Christian theology is founded upon the revelation of ultimate truth by the Incarnate Son of God, who is, in fact, *The Truth*, *The Light*, and *The Way*. That, presumably, is what all the planners are looking for.

The Christian religion is concerned with ultimate and not temporal things. It is concerned with the development of human personality—the salvation of souls, and not primarily with matters of politics, sociology, rural economy, or agricultural practice; but we have already seen that human development and salvation—development, that is, towards the ultimate goal—necessitates an “environment.” Man’s sojourn in this fleeting world necessitates a body and a mind and a spirit united in one being; and it is that whole personality which gives rise to its environment, for good or evil. If,

therefore, The Land is a truly purposeful synthesis, the whole of its life and work should become relevant to its religion; all its primary aspects should form an interconnected whole.

All things other than evil spring from God, and it is plain that all material aspects of The Land spring from that quality of fertility which is inherent in His creation. Man is sustained by this creation of the Father and redeemed by the Sacrifice of the Son, but man is *one* unit, the Father and the Son is *one* God. The idea of Rural Synthesis, therefore, suggests some combination of temporal and eternal values; an inter-connection between the Christian religion and agriculture by means of a personality that both worships and works.

But is this the case? Or could it be?

Is Christianity in any way relevant to the life and work of a twentieth-century village? Is Christianity of any practical value to the problems of modern agriculture, rural sociology, and economics? Can it really be perceived as an integral part of an environmental synthesis which combines Divine purpose with the tilling of the soil—have we here an embryonic Remnant?—or is the village church to sit complacently on its little green tuffet like some beautiful lady with nothing to do?