

Cambridge, January 22. 1957

Dear Margaret,

Before I start studying for my French examination I must write to tell you of my plans which have changed somewhat. I shall almost certainly leave here about 1 p.m. on Wednesday, and I should get to New York by eight, the weather permitting. If you have no teaching duties on Thursday, it might be nice if we drove to Philadelphia together that same night, and if I stayed at your house. We could then spend the morning together, since I would not have to leave for Chambersburg until mid-afternoon. If you would rather stay in New York, then I would also stay over-night; Prof. Vietor has offered to pay for my hotel bill, since he would like his car left in a garage over-night. You can tell me your decision whenever I get to New York. If the roads are poor, or if for any other reason I expect to arrive belatedly, I will call you from en route.

Vietor has been ill, but he hopes to be able to leave as planned. So do I. This afternoon I was invited to his home again; this time there were no other visitors and we had a very fine conversation. He is the only person whom I know who appreciates my problems and who does not think my critical attitude pathological (as do my parents) or hypocritical and immoral (as you do). We spoke first about my coming examination, about positivism and idealism in literary criticism, then about American attitudes toward literature, American attitudes toward education and finally about the changes which are taking place in the culture of the occident.

He assured me that there was no hope in Germany for any rebirth of an idealistically permeated way of life, and yet he always comes back to the suggestion that I should go to Germany. Probably he is not aware of the contradiction and finds it impossible to believe what he knows: that the ideals of the Germany he loved are more dead than those of ancient Greece. We spoke of America; without mentioning names I spoke of some of my experiences and impressions of your relatives, since I must tell someone, and he is the only person I know who takes me seriously. I told him about what I thought was the vulgar emphasis on sexuality, particularly in childhood. He agreed. He told me how thankful he was that he himself did not have children to bring up, and he told me that if I ever had children of my own, nothing I could do would make them different. I agreed, and in that instant I knew that everything of which I was convinced was true, and I thought much, but said nothing, so that I became very much confused.

I have thought much about your last letter, and I have hoped that for your sake that the things which you say are not true, or if true, not final. Else I must make you very unhappy. I think of you very, very often, and every train of thought begins and ends with the fact that I like you. You are wrong when you deprecate Gide's belief that two people can find their way to God through each other, and you thereby ~~forget~~ by the

greatest secret of Christian culture. It was Christ's teaching that love is the key to the Kingdom of Heaven which transformed eros from a purely physical manifestation of animality into a spiritual aspiration for ideality. Christianity made eros a way to God. - Have you ever seen Bernini's painting of St. Agatha's Ecstasy? - To love someone (or some thing) is to see in him an image of the divine. To love someone is to idealize him, is to find in him a way to God. Your mistake is that you think God is in another world separable from this. God's world is greater than our philosophies, and about the other world, I do not know. The only thing of which I am certain is that God is also in this world, and for me this world is inseparable from God, and if I seek God I must seek him here. Whatever is beautiful and true is of God, but whatever is ugly is not of God.

Therefore everything I do or see or hear is either for God or it is against him. I cannot find God in churches, because he is not there, - I do not believe in conversions. I must seek God in the things and people who are closest to me, because I can find God only there, and if I love him, it is by loving them. And so, contrary to what you say, all things are ways to God if we can find in them that which is of God. The greatest thing which can happen to any man is to find a person whom he can love or a task which he can fulfill which will bring him so close to God that he need no longer be unhappy.

You know that Purity of Heart is the will to one thing. Some men have found it necessary to quench the desire of their bodies with asceticism in order that they might will only one thing. Some have gone into the wilderness, some have become missionaries, some have become monks. Such sacrifices must be made by men who live in times of decay and unculture. Do you remember about the pillar saints and the birth of the monastic orders in the fifth and sixth centuries? Culture is that condition of a man in a society which makes it unnecessary for him to go into the wilderness or to condemn his body in his search for purity of heart. The monkish life makes religion sensual and passionate; the cultured life unifies sensuality and intellect and makes them the highest manifestation of the religious love for God.

I must write Mrs. Jarden a brief note now, telling her that I shall not come to see her on Thursday. This letter has taken a long time, but I hope it was time well taken, and I want its ideas to be the basis of all that we shall give to each other. I long very much for you, and I wish you were not so far away. But when you receive this letter it will not be long until I see you.

Good night.

Jorden.

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