

Conversation
Kim Colman
Upbeat
V.3, n. 8, 1970

I guess the Church is the best place to “talk to the world.” And it looked so very beautiful on that Saturday afternoon that I felt I had to tell someone. The dome was 50 feet high, and the stained glass windows could mesmerize me into the Holy Lands. I went upstairs to the balcony and looking down from it I could see behind the iconostasis and gaze at the altar. It looked immense, in every sense of the word.

While I was looking down from the balcony a parrot flew in the window. Teasingly, I asked him, “Did you ever see anything so beautiful?”

He answered, “War is a necessity.”

“What?” I was so startled to get any answer.

“War is a necessity.”

“Where’d you get that idea?” figuring I’d go along with him.

“If someone attacks you, war is a necessity.”

“I must be going crazy! I’m holding a conversation with a parrot.”

“Don’t be so facetious.”

“What?...Anyway, how can you say war is a necessity, even if you are attacked? I was taught to turn the other cheek.”

“Well, you can’t do that all the time. If Charlie shoots your sister are you going to say to him “Oh, that’s alright. Don’t worry about it.” Are you going to say that? Hmm?”

“Of course not. But the Ancient Hebrew saying ‘An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth’ doesn’t work any more.”

“Wow! I can tell you’re young.”

“Well, I’m sorry!” I answered quickly. I hate when they tell me that!

He continued, “Things just don’t work out that way. Pride comes into the picture. I love to use pride because I’m so successful with it. Man loves pride and will always take to it like candy. No one wants to look like he has no ‘nationalism,’ no family unity, no stick-togetherness.”

Well, I guess we all have pride, but there is a point to which it goes. Pride is as good as you make it. It is what we have pride in that makes the difference. I guess 'honor' is a better word for what I mean. I see no pride in blowing man's head off just to show – well, his ignorance, really."

He didn't stop there. "Let me give you another example. Wouldn't you lie to have money, a mansion, and respect? Wouldn't you be proud of it?"

"For what shall it profit a man to gain the whole world but lose his own soul?"

"Quick with the answers, huh?" he said.

At that moment man walked in with a pail and tools in his hands. He went downstairs. I suppose he was a janitor.

"You think that man's proud, or, as you put it, has 'honor?'" inquired the parrot.

"Being a janitor isn't that bad," I answered.

"But I bet he would want to have another job instead."

"You know, I bet he already has a second job."

"Uh-Huh." He proudly responded, seeming to have won a victory of a sort.

"But, that's not the point. The reason he has a second job is probably because he needs the money. There's not a word being said by him about being proud or not of his job.

He became angry now. "It's useless with you, isn't it?" I heard the janitor walk up the stairs and slam the door shut.

"You know, the good guys don't always win. Even in the movies the bad guys wear white hats," I blankly stated.

After a pause he continued: "In every war there has been, it wasn't the one who was right but the one who had the might that won. It stands to reason, too. It's practically a survival-of-the-fittest situation."

Once again, it seemed ridiculous to be talking to a parrot, but I continued anyway. "But many times the one who was right had the might and won."

"Purely accidental," he quickly retorted.

"You think so? I don't know. In wartime, everyone thinks their country is the best and right. That's probably a primary cause of war."

"Hey, you're getting the hang of it now!" he said proudly.

"Not yet. Just wait a minute. How do you know so much, anyway?"

“My teacher is Atlas. He’s seen everything and has given great thought to what the best rules are to live by. He only taught me facts of life.” I realized at that moment that the parrot was the world! I was talking to the world! I mumbled to myself, “too much if you ask me.”

“What?”

“Nothing.” Trying to show some good in the world, I pushed this argument in the other direction. “Okay...What about these alliances between countries? The more powerful are only trying to help the underprivileged.”

“You want to make a bet that’s not the only reason? Listen...Big Man economically help Small Fry. Small Fry increases stature, Big Man in trouble spot with another Big Man. Big Man asks previous Small Fry to help, previous Small Fry feels indebted to oblige. Get it?”

“Think you’re so smart, huh?” I had felt defeated by this time. But suddenly he said the very big thing that gave me the victory.

“I had a good teacher,” referring to the world.

“I have a better teacher.”

He brushed my response off. “We won’t go into that.” His wings started to flutter! It was clear now. It was the world’s teaching or Christ’s and he couldn’t stand the comparison. He completely lost his cool. He started to cackle loudly. Trying to act calmly, I bent down to fix my shoe. When I got up I saw the last glimpse of the parrot flying out the window. “I knew it. The world will always in, but it can never contend with Christ.”