

ON THE LEFT SIDE

A

When a rich man donated some money to St. Finbar's, which is a catholic church in Conn in Ireland, some of the money was spend on electrical wall-heaters in the right half of the church and some of it was spend on medical aid to the people of Burundi. A missionary, Philomena O'Halloran, was sent to Burundi and to raise money to support her mission, a special missionary box was mounted on the counter of the grocer's. At Christmas after twenty years O'Halloran sent a young man to Conn as a Christmas present. When the young man, Friday, arrived people were surprised, for he looked like O'Halloran. Friday told that he was O'Halloran's son, and the Catholics were terrified. On Christmas Eve during the Christmas Mass everybody except from Friday sat in the right half of the church. Bishop O'Rourke did not preach over Christmas but over the Day of Judgement. He told of the good on the right hand of God and the bad on the left hand of God. But suddenly some people began to move from the right side of the church to the left side, and O'Rourke's housekeeper took a statue of the black man of the Three Wise Men, and placed in front of the crib to protest against O'Rourke's treatment of Friday. When Friday returned to Burundi, only a few people in Conn kept collecting money to help the people in Burundi, and those people were the ones that sat the left side of the church.

B

One must always look upon things from different angles, for if everybody were narrow-minded progress would never be made.

This short story takes place in Conn in western Ireland which means that the inhabitants of Conn must be Catholics. Catholics have very strict rules compared to the Protestants, and when it is revealed that O'Halloran is no longer a virgin and that she thereby has broken an important catholic rule, there is a devil to play in the village of Conn. People's prejudices starts shining through e.g. the Widow Herphernan is too embarrassed to come to church on Christmas Eve because Friday is staying at her's, and Father O'Rourke denounce O'Halloran and Friday during the sermon.

In a Catholic society the priests have great influence on the people because the people have great respect of them being the representatives of God. "Father" is what the people call their priest, and that is exactly what he is to them. If e.g. someone has done something wrong, he is the one to talk, because it means a lot to a Catholic to go to confession to get absolution. In this short story the narrator went to confess with O'Rourke and he did give her absolution even though it was quite serious rule she had broken, and this tells us that even though Father O'Rourke has the power to ban her from the society, he does not, for after all he cares about his "children" and he knows that he knows better than them.

I think that the people in Conn are actually afraid of Father O'Rourke, because religion is such an important matter to them. During the Mass the narrator wanted to leave the church and never come back, but she did not - she just kept sitting there on the right side, and this is how I think many of the congregation also thought - they knew it was wrong of Father O'Rourke to act like he did, but only a few of them had the guts to defy him, and finally when some of them moved to the left side of the church, the narrator was one of the first to follow. It is obvious that it must have been a hard decision to make, for defying Father O'Rourke could mean that they would be ostracised from society if the protest was backed by the majority.

When Miss Dwyer in the ending of this short story places the black man of the Three Wise Men in front of the crib protesting against O'Rourke's treatment of Friday and O'Halloran, she compares him to Friday. This is really a serious protest

against Father O'Rourke, for while he talks of Friday as wicked, Miss Dwyer represents him as a saint. This tells that Miss Dwyer has not become a heathen, on the contrary she is using the religion she has learned from O'Rourke against himself.

It is obvious that the author disapproves with the majority of the people in Conn. I guess that he believes that religion is a fine thing, for otherwise he would have let the narrator leave the church during the Mass, I suppose. But what the author really wants with this story is to tell us that one should first of all listen to one self instead of letting somebody else control one's life. It is good to take advice from more experienced people, but one should always be critical, for not even the smartest can be right all the time. Seen in a larger perspective it is also good to be critical not only of individuals but also of the entire society. If e.g. people had not been critical through time, we would still have slaves and tyrants, and I guess we would still have been farmers all of us. So I think that criticism of the authorities leads to a better society, and I think that this is what the author tries to tell us.

Translation

It has caused sensation in England that the editing of Goebbel's diary has been handed over to the fanatic nazi sympathiser David Irving who denies that 6 million Jews systematically have been wiped out in Hitler's gas chambers.

In recent years right-wing extremists have succeeded in exploiting the unsettled state of Europe to incite violence against immigrants and refugees. And that is one of the reasons why many politicians are afraid that several people could be lead to believe in the neo-Nazi falsifications of history.

In Germany Irving has been fined for calling the Holocaust "a downright lie", and besides a number of countries have refused him entry permit.

