

PERSON AND SOCIETY¹

OUR ideas of the freedom of man and of the rights of man depend on the view we take of human nature and of the purpose for which man exists. Whether we are fully aware of this or not, it is the basis of all our notions about ourselves, about the family, about the State, and about international order.

If man has dignity, freedom, rights, it is because he has, individually and personally, a certain *value as a human being*. Christianity teaches that this value is given to him by God who has created man in his own image and has made him for himself. That is, man has a soul which is able to know truth and love good and which finds its eternal happiness in the vision of God. God did not make man and then leave him to his own devices. He made him for a definite purpose. The basis of man's rights is his right to fulfil this purpose. An attack on human freedom is an attack on the human person, on the dignity of man. We shall see that whenever man's value in the eyes of God is denied, his dignity is debased and his freedom is attacked.

We take our fellow men for granted. But in fact we have one or two deep convictions about them. We think of them as equal. This does not mean that they are the same. 'Look round about you. You see every size and shape, age and ability. But try to think of the man next to you, the man next door, even those against whom we are fighting, as having a quite different, inferior, nature like a dog. You cannot do it. We believe, too, that all have, as human beings, a certain value and dignity which we express in terms of rights—the rights of man. This is well expressed in the American Declaration of Independence: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.' Or with regard to one particular right, as expressed in the Joint Letter to *The Times*: 'Every child, regardless of race or class, should have equal opportunities of education, suitable for the development of his peculiar capabilities.'

Because in many ways we take man's personality, *i.e.* his value, for granted, it is only when it is attacked that this value comes home to us. In other words, being a question of value, it can only be

¹ With grateful acknowledgement to 'The Sword of the Spirit.'

seen comparatively: if all men treated all other men as human persons there would be no need for this study. This is particularly clear to us to-day because over large areas of the globe the value of man is denied outright and, in the rest of the world, it is often debased and still more often misunderstood or ignored. At times too much is claimed for the individual. This is because the nature of man and the purpose for which he has been made are wrongly conceived.

With the growth of industrialism and of a great mass of people without property, some industrialists imposed on their employees in the name of 'Every man for himself' conditions of great hardship. (For the earliest and worst excesses, refer to *The Village Labourer*, *The Town Labourer*, *The Skilled Labourer*, all by J. L. and B. Hammond. For conditions to-day, many will remember the recent film *The Stars Look Down*.)

They thought themselves justified by the theories of the early nineteenth century economists. These writers taught that the greatest good of the greatest number would be achieved by every man serving his own private material interest. They called this theory the 'Natural Harmony of Interests.' Every man would pursue his own profit and a wonderful natural harmony would result. Where these thinkers went wrong was that they started from the wrong conception of human nature—the economic man. It was thought that happiness was to be achieved only through the possession of money, and men's value came to be measured in terms of it. A few of many similar Victorian expressions illustrate this: 'making good,' which meant making money; 'good as gold'; 'sterling worth.' Such a theory if acted upon was bound to bring about an economic order which was inhuman. To give an obvious example, the work of children five years old for eighteen hours a day in cotton mills was once justified on the plea that the nation's prosperity demanded it.

Instead of 'harmonising' interests nineteenth century economics led to the establishment of a purely competitive system. The old warnings against avarice and lust of wealth were forgotten; it was thought that the profit motive must be the driving and directing force behind industry. But profit motive and competitive system translated into ordinary language mean money grubbing and doing your neighbour down. Later on, Darwin's theory of the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest was misapplied to economics. Competition was glorified as a way of weeding out incompetence and producing greater efficiency. Another way of saying the survival of the fittest is, after all business is business. It was not the principle of private property that was at fault. To own property is one

of the rights of man and the responsibility that goes with it should help him to educate himself in the right use of his freedom. The trouble arose because the *unlimited* accumulation of wealth was made into a virtue and extremes of poverty and insecurity were tolerated. The results of such a system were degrading both to those who succeeded and to those who failed.

The whole notion of a system based on struggle, *e.g.* the fixing of prices and wages competitively, destroyed the dignity of the poorer men. They, owning no land or capital, were obliged to treat themselves as richer men treated their capital. They had to sell their labour according to the price it would fetch in the open market, not according to their needs as men. If that price did not cover their needs, then these needs had to go unsatisfied, even if they included food, shelter, and the bringing up of a family. In a sense these workers ceased to be regarded as men at all. They were called 'hands,' a sign that only their labour counted.

But neither did those who rose to the top really benefit as human beings from the system. Man is raised up or sinks down to the level of what he loves and serves. A system which made it appear that man's greatest good was material prosperity could not but degrade him. In the capitalist countries of to-day the image of the successful money-maker is often as horrifying as the fact that lack of money condemns people to a narrow and almost inhuman existence. Capitalism, however, is not a way of life, but only a way of making money. A capitalist state, though run on wrong lines, can be reformed. Capitalism makes no claim to cover more than the economic sphere and is indifferent to religion.

With Communism and Nazism we come to systems which, like Capitalism, are inhuman, but which cannot be modified and must be replaced. This is so because these systems are in themselves religions. They claim to cover every sphere of human activity, which is what we mean when we call them totalitarian. They do not over assert the personality of the individual. They deny it completely. They put in its place the fictitious personality of 'collective man,' whether he be the racial group, or the economic class, expressed as the State, and to this they give absolute value. In these systems there is only one person—the State. That the same view exists in Italy is shown by Mussolini's words: 'The Fascist State is itself conscious, and has itself a will and personality.' In other words, not God but the State gives value to man's actions.

The followers of Marx disregarded the spiritual side of man's nature. Man's cultural activities were only a kind of shadowy reflection of changing material conditions. For Marx the only real things

were material things. The most material thing in any community is its economic system—the physical resources of the land, sea and air, together with the technique of production, the tools with which men work. If such things alone were real, then men would be distinguished from each other only by their economic function. They were completely conditioned by the class to which they belonged. The unequal distribution of wealth was thought to be the only source of friction in a society, and class war inevitable so long as private property was not abolished.

Religion, philosophy, art were thought to be only 'superstructures' used in the capitalist state to cover or explain away the fundamental evils of the system.

We have spoken of the crimes committed in nineteenth century England in the name of national prosperity. In modern Russia industrialisation was forced through in two years instead of in two lifetimes. This meant that millions had to die of starvation. But whereas the excesses of Capitalism were seen to be evil and legislation introduced to remedy them, the conscience of Communists is not shocked by the evils which are permitted in Russia.

This is understandable. If man's spiritual nature is denied, then he has no personal, individual value. His purpose cannot be to know and love God, to establish that unique relationship with him that is personal to each human being. His purpose, in such a system, is to serve the State which can achieve its end—material prosperity—collectively. The individual is not indispensable, and can be sacrificed completely to the State. Only the material interests which the State represents are important. This is why, in spite of that genuine indignation at the lot of workers which gives Communism its moral fervour, the system which it has produced is inhuman. It forgets all about the individual.

Nazism is inhuman for a very similar reason, only here it is not the class which swallows up man but the racial group. Man's value, his dignity, his rights, depend on the blood in his veins. The State represents, not the workers, but the Aryans. The population of Greater Germany is divided into three castes. The first is those who are of German origin (complete Aryans) and who are endowed with full rights; the second is of subject peoples like the Poles and Czechs; the third comprises Jews.

We have assumed that the acts which men do receive their value from the fact that they are human acts—the human element gives them their value. A man is to be praised or blamed for an action which he has performed freely, in so far as it is in accordance with the nature which God gave him and the purpose for which God

made him. But, under the totalitarian systems his actions have value only if they are in accordance with the will of the State, which is the caprice of the dictator, whether he be the Führer, Duce or proletariat. A man may be praised or blamed only according to the inhuman standard of the State.

In these systems man derives his value, not from himself, but only in so far as he is an efficient cog in the machine of State. But if a man is a cog in a machine or a corpuscle in the Nordic blood stream, his whole life from cradle to grave, including all his relations with his fellow men, whether inside the State or out of it, must be completely dominated by the State.

(a). To begin with, nobody has a right to exist unless permitted by the State, which judges by its own standards, *e.g.* the treatment of non-Aryans in Germany, koulaks or Trotskyites in the U.S.S.R.

(b). In these two countries the child belongs body and soul to the State, which decides what it shall be taught and teaches it. It usurps completely the position of the parents, even going so far as to reward children for spying on their parents and reporting them for offences or supposed offences against their new parents—the State. Family love—parents for children, children for parents, brothers for sisters—is not annihilated, but is diabolically changed into an instrument of the State.

(c). Men have no voice in choosing where they will work or what they will do. This is decided for them by the State, and disobedience means, more often than not, starvation. They are not allowed to form the groups and associations which men normally tend to constitute, *e.g.* trade unions. If these exist at all, they are State-made and State-controlled.

(d). The Totalitarian State to which we have been referring is one man or a group of men (irrespective of how they have arrived at that position—usually by violence) imposing their will on the community. The only contribution the community as a whole has to make to its government is one of ratification, *e.g.* the irregular meetings of the Reichstag, the incredibly unanimous plebiscites in Germany and Russia, and the fact that in these two countries there is no equivalent to His Majesty's Opposition.

(e). If for such a State the absolute standard of justice and morality is the State itself, then obviously in the international sphere there can be no honour and fidelity, no recognition of the rights of other states. In other words, such a state must dominate the whole world or continually be in process of dominating it.

We began by taking our idea of man to be self-evident, just as the Americans did when they drew up their declaration. But if the new

totalitarian state can so degrade man, it is clear that his dignity is not so self-evident. It must be that we assert and they deny something about man which makes all the difference between a free human being and a slave owned by the State. We have seen that when money, race or economic function are used as the measure of human worth, man is degraded and despised. This is because his value cannot be measured by any material, or indeed by any human, standard. Christianity teaches us that his dignity depends on his value in the eyes of God. Man is made for God and must recognise him as the end for which he is made. This is part of his very humanity. Once substitute something else for God and man ceases to be human.

God has made man a compound being of body and soul. To know and love God man must be in some way like to God. This likeness is in the powers of his soul which make him the highest of all creatures on earth: his intelligence or reason and his will. Man can know, can judge, can reflect, can remember—he is an intelligent being who can know truth. All other creatures are bound to the earth, they are material with no admixture of spirit. But man can escape the bounds of time and space, there is no limit to the amount he can know nor to the intensity with which he can love. Because of his personality man is like God. God, in whom personality is perfect, knows and loves himself and all his creatures in him, while man's highest activities are knowing and loving, and he becomes most perfect—most true to himself and most like to God—by knowing and loving God.

To know and see God is man's destiny, that which God has fitted him to do for ever by giving him an immortal soul. It is this that gives him his personal dignity. We are familiar with this in our everyday life where we give value to things according to that for which we destine them. We value some things because they are more lasting than others—a suit or a dress; or because they express more of ourselves, are more like us—a picture; or we value a present on account of the friend who has given it to us. We give value to things according to their destiny. Because all men are made for God they are equal. Because each one is loved by God individually and personally and has a special relationship with him, each one has a unique, infinite and irreplaceable value. So we see that when the political economists advocated enlightened self interest they went wrong because they did not put man's worth high enough. If man loved himself as God loves him—that is loved his own greatest good which is God—he would love the good of his fellow men and there would result the harmony which these writers sought for. Chris-

tianity has taught man to love God and to see God in his neighbour. The nineteenth century economists, and now the totalitarian philosophers, teach him to love and serve a lesser good. Man is no longer God to his fellows, but a wolf. By making material happiness an end in itself, by exalting human personality at the expense of God, the inventors of economic man prepared the way for man's lowest degradation.

Christianity taught, and teaches, that human destiny was above the world and therefore above the State. In certain spheres the State has no authority. A sphere of freedom was thus created where the civil power had no jurisdiction. Further, because the purpose of man's life and his activities on earth was to attain to supernatural happiness, it followed that the State itself must be ordained to that end. It was this idea which produced the great tradition of the West in which, as opposed to the despotisms of the East, the citizen was recognised as the end of government. The State existed to serve man, not man the State.

But once the supernatural destiny of man was denied, there was no reason why man should not become ultimately subservient to the State. Christianity offered to him the infinite dignity and the infinite resources of Divine Life. Not only was man destined for God, but already his whole nature, body and soul, had been glorified by the Incarnation; already the indwelling of God in man's heart was the beginning of eternal life on earth.

True liberty, true dignity, true vitality, spring from the depths of the human conscience. This is why the image of the new totalitarian man is so horrifying. It is that of a being cut off from the source of Life.

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