

BALANCE OF POWER IN THE CITY OF GOD

THE term "social reconstruction" has almost of late years become a pass word assuring admission into the House of Commons. Perhaps by design it is nebulous in meaning and the more capable of adjustment to varied contexts. In common usage an idea is enshrined expressive of consorted endeavour to marshal forces within society with a view to economic needs. With this ill-defined campaign, peace conferences and international treaties may well harmonize. Assurance is given, by an elegant gesture, of every type of worldly gain and to the best advantage. The fulcrum of world leverage is money made productive by wealth. So now peace itself is converted into a commodity on the world market for sale at the costly price of armaments. But here, too, moral values are involved and though disguised as national "interests" cannot be weighed in material scales. The bodies and souls of men are incapable of adjustment to a gold standard. The moral worth indeed of human enterprises is accorded to them by ethical sanctions in regard to which they are deserving of praise or blame.

Civil society has as its worthy aims felicity and prosperity in common, yet to make these aims exclusive is to unsettle the balance of power and to leave standing a tottering ruin. A polarizing of society by the decentralisation of its moral units must inevitably lead to social unbalance. Over-much indulgence to the freedom of disorderly and shattered instincts cannot result in anything harmonious within the social group. Under pain of social anarchy self-realization must be allied in partnership with self-restraint. Social reformers have not been unaware of the unhappy path which events have taken, and have adopted various methods to avert the threatened destruction. At first the gospel that might is right had its vogue, only to give place now to the dominance of power in the person of a dictator who is strong enough to mould the weaker members in accordance with his views.

The individual well-being of man is assured by the correct

BLACKFRIARS

orientation of his whole person through his mind and will in relation to the sovereign good. Manly uprightness implies the correct turning of the will towards life's goal,¹ as seen in the light of reason and faith. This is undoubtedly the demand of Christian ethics, which take into due account the conflict between nature and grace.² The power of balance given to man by his faith and reason will enable him to place the objects of his desires in an orderly series each subordinate to the other, and carefully related to that which is final. The acquisition of all other things can only be regarded as beneficial inasmuch as they are viewed as instalments of the best and perfect. The goal set before every human pursuit is the lasting possession of a perfect good which will bring with it a state of perfect happiness, "a perfect and sufficient good, excluding every evil and fulfilling every desire." In reality God is the moving force behind and in front of this tireless longing, which is only brought to rest when the objective is reached. But deliberate action responding to his yearning is the only means whereby a man may gather to himself that which he wants. And so he becomes God's collaborator in a divine economy for working out his own destiny and bringing him eventually to unfailing happiness. Still it has nowadays become an increasing tendency to consider as irrelevant eternal issues, and so for religion is substituted philanthropy or "a humanism with a veneer, and sometimes only a thin veneer, of Christianity."³ In these circumstances it is not wonderful that ethical standards are readjusted to the demands of modern conditions, and even the moral code itself is thought to require modification by the incorporation of such catch phrases as the "right to kill" and the "right to die." It is evident that a truce has been proclaimed in the combat against passion in the name of sentiment and so-called intellectualism. This tendency is still more insidious when it masquerades as an ethical theory, and is to some extent rendered coherent by a process of reasoning.

¹ St. Thomas, *Summa*, Ia IIae, p. 5, a. 7.

² *Imitation*, Bk. III, c. 54; St. Thomas, Ia, IIae, qq. 85, 86; P. Garrigou-Lagrange, *L'Amour de Dieu*, tom. I, pp. 186 sqq.

³ A. W. F. Blunt, D.D.: *Grace and Morals*, p. 39.

BALANCE OF POWER IN THE CITY OF GOD

That which should bestir the heart of every man is not only whatever may be gratifying to certain senses or faculties, but everything that is in any way appropriate to his powers and at the same time beneficial to his whole person. The universe is indeed very good to behold, since it is God's handiwork, it is God's building, yet its true splendour is only caught when in it are seen the delicate traces of divine beauty. But man in his contacts with the world outside him is only too liable to become the victim of passion and caprice, by yielding himself up to the over-insistent cravings of some particular desire. It is in this way that human energies may be sapped and drawn aside from life's main issue. St. Thomas has a psychological explanation based on experience:

"As all the powers of the soul are rooted in the one essence of the soul, it follows of necessity that when one power is intent on its act, another power becomes remiss, or is even altogether impeded, in its act, both because all energy is weakened through being divided, so that, on the contrary, through being centred on one thing, it is less able to be directed to several; and because, in the soul's operations, a certain attention is requisite, and if this be closely fixed on one thing, less attention is given to another. In this way, by a kind of distraction, when the movement of the sensitive appetite is enforced in respect of any passion whatever, the proper movement of the rational appetitt or will must, of necessity, become remiss or altogether impeded."⁴

Further, in response to the terrific impact of the Fall a definite reaction has been generated in the whole of human nature. The just poise which should be man's by right has been shaken to the foundations and the moral structure is left unsettled and uncertain. Special difficulty is experienced in well-doing, and a proneness to evil on account of unruly passion. Naturally, too, society at large has been the recipient of violent repercussions which still endanger the social edifice. A complete social collapse may be averted only by the establishment of a balance of power within the individuals of society. The City of God, which is the heavenly and earthly kingdom, cannot otherwise provide man in due measure with his temporal and spiritual needs. There is

⁴ *Summa*, Ia IIae, 77, 1.

BLACKFRIARS

always a danger of the individual being divided against himself, and this must result in a rift within the society to which he belongs.

The reason of this is that the exercise of every human faculty is the expression of man's person, the man as a whole, and if it is to be worthy of him it should not be allowed to degenerate into a mere pandering to the clamourings of one particular appetite to the detriment of his general well-being in view of his supernatural end. He may indeed be allowed, and is allowed, to place in deposit such goods as are an asset to him as a person journeying towards the riches of eternal life, but without allowing one or other of his faculties to corner its own particular goods at the expense of his general welfare as a person. What is true of the individual is equally so of the body politic into which he is incorporated. There is an hierarchical arrangement of functions within the personal unit, which if it is to maintain its integrity and balance must be respected by the whole social organism. Both the human person and the moral person which is the social group are designed to enjoy a settled disposition by which their higher powers of mind and will offer their homage to God, while the lower faculties yield to the rule of reason. This is the moral scale of values which guarantees the uprightness of man within himself as well as the continuance of civilized society. This is no arbitrary arrangement since it is based on the necessary ratio of desirable things in respect of the corresponding faculties precisely as orientated towards the true ultimate end of the person to whom they minister.

In rebuilding the social fabric those who are charged with its reconstruction must begin with regaining a balance of power within themselves by reinstalling the reign of reason instead of wild ideals born of subjective feelings. Only so can the new building of God's City rise up on old foundations. Human minds and wills need once again to be orientated not towards a fiction but towards their real final end, which is essentially supernatural and the main-spring of every worthy endeavour both personal and political. Man's moral life demands much more than outward respecta-

BALANCE OF POWER IN THE CITY OF GOD

bility. Yet it would be vain to pass over by ignoring the fact that something catastrophic has taken place in the history of mankind which has placed in jeopardy individual and social harmony. The rejection of dogma results in the setting aside of moral teaching. The dethroning of faith and reason has broken the moral unity of the human person, making him a victim of his own caprices, since the balance of power has been carried away. The same will hold good in due proportion of the community of associated persons. The untimely character of his behaviour, often in response to inclinations of a purely physiological type, compares unfavourably with that of the lower animals.

Recognition of truth need never result in pessimism if it is safeguarded by the conviction that in the depths of his being man can be other and better than his actions sometimes lead us to conclude, and that by trusting in his better nature he may take his proper place in the social structure of God's building. This is a balanced optimism which inspires the effort for social reconstruction in dealing with others with a view to the common good, and "even the mature should be made aware of this trust that is placed in them."⁵

However, every enterprise is in danger of misdirection unless the aim asserted by the minds of rulers and ruled is "the primacy of the Logos,"⁶ the sovereign Good, and the true light which enlightens the minds of men. Then may social reformers safely embark on their quest and man may have the opportunity of recapturing his former greatness under God. By the acquiring of knowledge based on experience, whilst always drawing vitality and illumination from the life of grace, they may bear all things forward to a great though unseen finality through the agency of appropriate means.

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⁵ *The Psychology of Character*, by Rudolf Allers, p. 39.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 40.