

PATH TO FREEDOM

As so often in history, so in our time, a gross disorder in Christendom was heralded by a wave of anti-Semitic persecution.

Had we been used to thinking of Christendom as an entity, we should have been more alarmed when this happened. The Jews are a sign, a witness. Mediaeval consciousness was tormentingly aware of the presence of these strangers with its sublime or sinister meaning. It was angry with them: the Jews whose conversion was to precede the Second Coming delayed the kingdom of glory by their refusal. They stood for the official sign of disbelief, but also for God's answer to it; they were man's denial of the Incarnation, yet the Incarnation had made their wounds the wounds of Christ.

Was it part of their business to harry the Christian conscience? Did not their spiritual pride quicken humility? Was not their lack of faith somehow a testing of the fruits of faith? Did they not even mysteriously escape God's condemnation so long as there was an excuse for not recognising His Son in those who should manifest Him? Perhaps they were like hard seeds left in a wintry soil, closed up until the water of baptism had softened it and charity had made it gentle for the slow shoots to break out into the daylight of faith. This might not happen until the end of the world; meanwhile, the world had to suffer it and be prevented from crystalising into mineral perfection.

The Jews witnessed to God and to human freedom. If Christ had died of the consequences of that freedom, He had also died for it. He had not called down destruction on the earth, or the legions of angels to deliver Him because His Incarnation was in time and the time of mortal life is that of mercy, of man's choice and of God's expecta-

tion. He had imposed on His Church the duty of suffering: toleration in Christians could not be easy; it could not come from indifference; it must be the respect due to the human person, consent to the being of others based on the Divine consent. It has the costliness of charity—*misericordia*—the misery of the heart. The price of human freedom was settled at the creation by God's extravagance.

Their knowledge of God compels saints to love Him; or it makes them free not to refuse love. So the perfect order of the heavenly society ensures man's perfect freedom to fulfil himself. Short of this there is no perfect order nor perfect freedom. Earthly citizenship is a compromise. Man's liberty on earth is to enable him to choose the franchise of the Heavenly City. Until he has made his choice the State must secure for him his liberty. He must be protected from the arbitrary will of others. A just human order guarantees to the individual and to the group the conditions which favour the exercise of human virtue. It cannot compel that virtue. So there is more or less a satisfactory give and take. The striving towards better adjustment, the joy of friendship, the beauty of achievement and much suffering. The pattern is not an end in itself. It is valid because it reflects the natural law willed by God and ordained by Him towards man's supernatural happiness. Only man is an end in himself with regard to everything which serves him to realise his destiny.

It might have been expected that the Jew should be the first victim of a society which rejected the Christian order. For one thing the Jew is a prophet by vocation and there is no room for prophecy in a society which does not look beyond an earthly fulfilment. Even when he is unfaithful to his calling he does not cease to be an oracle. When his unquenchable hope does not prophesy God's coming, the outbreak of human passion against him prophesies disaster.

So when his clamour rose over Europe we should have taken better heed.

In one part of what had been Christendom there had arisen a society no longer of human persons joined in the pursuit of a common good, but one which claimed to be its own end, a person in its own right. It could immolate to itself the rights of its members because it offered to them in exchange perfect freedom. There cannot be perfect freedom without innocence: the State claiming to be subject to no law, to no authority higher than its own, claimed that it could not sin. Its members shared this intoxicating liberty.

Like God, it offers to man an exchange of hearts. But where God waits for man's consent, suffering his dallying, the State has no time. It does away with the dispensation of time which is that of the Redemption. The earth, refusing the baptismal flood, crushes all that germinates in it. Its beauty is now, not in the green shoots, but in its own strength and hardness, its diamond purity achieved by compression.

We have said that 'collective man' is free by identification with the State and through the sacrifice of his personal human freedom. Living by and for the State individually he is not a person at all, only part of the collective personality. The State, the 'Superman,' is free not with the limited freedom of the individual in a law-abiding community, not with the freedom of those who have overcome the world in themselves, but with the tiger freedom given him by the denial of God's stake in the world.

It is essential to him to strive to dominate creation to the extent of his power. It is the only domain open to him. He cannot, like the Christian, choose to give up all to possess ALL; he is himself the all. The superman made up of the 'dust of men' cannot strive for a truly human end.

Life becomes a trial of power. ('Our limits are the limits of our strength.') His strength is the superman's title of nobility, his fitness to survive, his right to life, to lebensraum. The weak are not only his natural prey, they are the blemish to Beauty. They are also the scapegoat, the opposition against which he affirms his innocence.

The innocent do not need to be redeemed. But it still takes a scapegoat for man to explain his innocence. Purity must still be bought at the price of blood. But it is the world that must be purged of bad blood; the superman must purge himself of pity. The totalitarian State defines itself by marking down an enemy, crushing an opposition. It needs to find its own enemy—that which opposes the 'good' which is itself to account for evil and to destroy it.

It has been pointed out that it has smuggled itself into that position by putting an abstraction in place of reality. Its kingdom is a parody of that kingdom which had no enemy except evil. The victimised class, race, nation, are not nations of sinful men but evil itself. Like the substitution of counters for money in roulette, this abstraction helps to set free human passions. It hastens the dislocation of mankind after its unity in God has been denied. The collective man has no brother; he does not share in the sin and redemption of mankind; he does not deserve suffering and he is immune from compassion. He is no less an abstraction than his enemy. He is the myth which prevents men being real to each other; the magic which hides from each man the face of his neighbour, the intruder on self-love. Those who identify themselves with it need to destroy Christ wherever He opposes to it His incarnate reality.

The Jews in National Socialism did not stand for the denial of Christ, but for Christ. It was He Who had to be deprived of citizenship; otherwise there would be no disposing of human rights, of the pretensions of that humanity which He has made His own so concretely that He is its first victim.

When this policy was declared we should have seen what was coming. Once the freedom of the supermen had broken out it would come to a hard struggle for any freedom. There was no longer any possibility of a half-way house, of a half-conscious liberalism. We had to re-discover the basis, the reason of the order of human society.

It has been said that there are only two kinds of love—the love of self and the love of God, the one growing at the expense of the other. The saint knows that there is only one kind of love: 'whose measure is to be without measure' and 'whose object must be immeasurable.' He knows that we cannot love *others* except with that love, and how to bear the same love towards himself. That which is opposed to it is the 'proprium'—man's greed, his attachment to himself not as destined for God and so of inestimable worth, but as his own creature and possession—his love not for his infinite but for his finite good.

Where the 'proprium' ends the love of God begins. The ultimate reason for the existence of society is to disappropriate us for God.

It needs a free person to give away his rights and it needs a neighbour to dispossess him. So there must be a just human order to secure man's liberty and human friendship to teach him what to do with his liberty.

We cannot love all men, we cannot love our enemies except with the love of God, and any love which falls short of this falls short of its true measure. But it needs those neighbours whom we can see, whose wants we understand, to impoverish us, to make room in us for the immeasurable. The function of the community is to 'e—ducate' us, to draw us out from its own limits.

But where the love of God ends the 'proprium' begins. When we do not love God in our neighbours we love ourselves in them. So, like the tribal god of a closed religion, the love which identifies us with our community does not necessarily open outwards. One must be a real person to love at all, and one must have real neighbours.

The collective myth disappropriates man not of his self-love but of himself, not of his limitations but of infinity.

Where collective man substitutes the personality of the State for his own and so becomes free to extend his dominion, the Christian, for the sake of whose superhuman destiny the State exists, is free to be poor of all else. There is no finite good he may not give away; greater love has no man than to lay down his life. But no love can claim the sacrifice of truth because it cannot exist without it.

The contrast between the mystical body of the State and that of Christ is not hard to draw. The indivisible God, the whole Christ, is in each of His members. Each man is whole, indispensable, and 'all else exists to enable him to attain his end.' But Christ is also *all men*. The solidarity of the human race is so clearly affirmed that the Christian is insolently certain of it. Like St. Paul, he would almost rather not have Heaven than be separated from his brethren.

Fallen man cannot redeem himself and he cannot be redeemed alone. Were he free from sin the sinner would still be himself in the flesh of Adam and of Christ, and so long as there is a cry of pain on the earth he cannot be immune from suffering. The more guiltless he is the greater his poverty, his participation in the need of mankind, his consent to it. Innocence itself is the gift of the Redemption. Mary alone is wholly innocent, but her freedom from original sin was itself the precious fruit of the Redemption that was to come, the anticipated reward of her consent which was the condition of the Redemption. Yet she does not claim her innocence entirely for her own: in her was somehow forgiven the sin of mankind.

The 'human condition' is poverty—the want of being which cries out for re-Creation, the poverty of contingent being hungering for its fulfilment, the abyss created by sin which invokes the 'excess' of the liberality of God.

Mary's poverty is at the same time her consent to God. This is at the centre of Christianity—the consent of the

human creature to God, Who has made human freedom to be the limitation of His omnipotence in man's regard. She is the 'true creature'; so complete is her poverty that she became the need of mankind, the Mother of Hope; so entire her consent that it drew down God into the communion of mortal suffering. There is nothing in her that she claims for her own, so it must be that all should be Grace in her. This inviolate purity of the creature wholly assenting to God makes of the Heavenly Jerusalem the true figure of Christian society.

What has the just human order to do with the order of Divine Charity? Justice is the condition of charity, and without charity one cannot be just. The earthly city cannot substitute itself for the eternal without destroying itself. But unless it is that City in hope and by the exercise and the expectation of mercy it cannot be human.

It is not the indestructible Kingdom which can be at stake in our wars, but that natural order informed by grace without which it is inaccessible. In fighting for the earthly city, in defence of our just rights, to remain pure our intention must be to guard that heavenly city which human society bears within itself. It must be this instinct which accounts for the invocation of Mary whenever the life of Christendom has been at stake.

We have come into this war as an indifferent Christian might stumble upon martyrdom. Perhaps it is well for mankind that there should be moments when the whole of civilization faces death. It makes men think out what they value and for what it is worth dying. And it is all-important for them to know what they die for. Martyrdom renews the world and martyrs are not made by being killed, but by dying for the love of God. It is possible for man to die in defence of his friends in such a way that he dies also for his enemies.

Our countries had not substituted a different creed for the Christianity latent in their culture. But it was not until we had to defend our values that we saw it as urgent

to think out what made them real. We re-discovered in France that her patriotism is inseparable from the idea of her Christian vocation and in our own country those things for which England stands to us are essentially Christian. We cannot worthily represent Christendom in the world struggle. If the German State is the enemy of freedom, we, too, have sinned against justice; we have dethroned Christ in the person of the poor. But we have not denied all knowledge, and we could not be the accomplices in the destruction of hope.

We are facing an enemy who is motivated not merely by greed, but by a religion of satanic unreason. It will be hard enough for us to prevail unless we reaffirm our own belief, and victory may come too late to retrieve anything human out of the shambles. Against this spirit it is not enough that we should fight only men for our independence. More than this hangs on our victory. War which can never be anything but a scourge must bring home to us the immensity of the greater evil. But it must be the occasion for us to deepen our understanding and to purge our will.

The duty of the Christian is compassion. It is for him to unite himself with all the human need, the hunger of the God-needing creation. The all-powerful martyrdom of Mary must continue in him. The purity of her indignation must safeguard his hatred of sin. Her consent must guarantee in him the divine hope. So after all, war-time is not so different for him from the time of imperfect peace; it is only in our calendar that Good Friday is separated from Easter Sunday.

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