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PITY OR PEACE

‘IT ought to be obvious that our future will be either Catholic-Christian or Atheist-Communism’. This challenge comes from Fr Martindale writing in the *Sunday Express* of October 21. It sets in a new contrast the two conflicting powers in the world today. Catholic spokesmen have of late been insisting that the perennial struggle between good and evil has entered a fresh phase, more violent but at the same time more clearly defined in its oppositions. These statements have seemed sometimes rather trite and platitudinous, but they do point to a separating of evil from good into a straight fight between the Catholic Church and paganism. The power of good is in general called Christian; and that is becoming manifestly identified with Catholic; the powers of evil are called pagan and they are variously designated, Communist, Bolshevist, Russian, and earlier, Fascist, Totalitarian, Nazi.

It would, however, be a grave error to make these black-and-white contours into any kind of territorial or even credal divisions. To some these powers for God and against God are separated by the “iron curtain” with grace pouring out of the Vatican to the south and vice triumphing over the north-east with Moscow as its centre. Such a

childish view of the situation is dangerous because it removes any sense of personal responsibility from the faithful Catholic and induces a hypocritical contempt of those opposed to the Church.

Evidently the first scene of the struggle between good and evil is not in any foreign land but within each man's own heart. The iron curtain separates the evil inclinations from the good aspirations in each one of us. The conflict ultimately lies in the minds and hearts of all men, whether they reside in Lambeth Palace, the Kremlin, the Braunhaus or the Vatican. The antagonism between East and West, Catholicism and Communism, Christianity and the neo-pagans, can only be judged in relation to the antagonism in the souls of all men individually.

The influences in one direction or the other will of course vary according to outward circumstances. A man untouched by any human tradition or culture and with original sin as his only bias towards wrongdoing might be expected to respond more readily to a good than a bad influence. He is born with the law of nature working in his members quite as strongly as original sin. He may give way to evil desires inclining him to lechery or theft, but at first he will do so knowing it to be wrong, knowing that he ought not to do such things. And if he were presented with an equal encouragement to build upon his natural inclinations for good he would be more likely to grow into a good pagan than into a criminal. Where there is, therefore, an organised tradition of good living, of respect for human nature and its way of behaving, there men will tend to be on the side of the angels. On the contrary, organised methods of giving way to original sin will produce almost a *race* of pirates and whores. It is quite clear that twenty years of organised atheism have so far corrupted the peoples east of the Elbe as to make it possible nominally to reinstate the Orthodox Church without any threat to the triumph of paganism in those lands. It is clear also that the Christian tradition is still powerful enough to influence men—even unbelievers—towards God and virtue in those lands where it has not been systematically suppressed.

There is that much to be said regarding the territorial divisions. But that is not much; for if we examine our own house we shall find that the system under which we live has largely undermined the natural power of good among us. The system of education assists to ruin the family and the minds and wills of the children . . . the attitude to wealth and property incline to brutal competition rather than fraternal co-operation . . . the list could continue but it is too familiar to be here repeated. It means that the natural law is being systematically smothered so that it no longer appears evil to exchange wives or abandon, or even murder, children. These crimes no longer call forth a protest from society in general, because men do not feel the

respect for their own nature within themselves. Theft and murder of adults still produce horror among most men because they can see in such acts a threat to their own existence. But even these rights are gradually being eclipsed by the tradition of slavery and the omnipotent state.

The division of powers, therefore, cuts across life in England, France, Italy or America, and its relation to the 'iron curtain' is slight and unimportant compared with this civil strife within our own hearts and at our own hearths. We must begin by searching out the weaknesses within ourselves before we shout aloud against Russia or Germany. And when we come to consider the evil powers at home we need not concern ourselves merely with the social ills in education and property so frequently referred to in our Catholic propaganda. There are far more personal and therefore powerful trends towards the 'atheist-communist' camp in us than these results of external organisation and social behaviour.

One source of evil in particular can be stopped at once. This is the habit of self-pity which exercises such a hold on people today. This may sound remote from Russia and world politics, but in fact the success of most revolutionary forces has been due to the power of grievance. The great leaders such as Hitler, Lenin and Mussolini have been able to leap to power because they knew the art of playing on individual grievances and linking them up with class, racial or social grievances. The same force can be seen at work now in Palestine, or India. Unrest and discontent are being used, largely at the moment by Communist leaders, as the most powerful weapons in the struggle to overthrow the old and traditional society. In this the agitator can also harness innate powers for good; he can use the craving for natural rights, stirring up grievances in terms of what is due in justice to his hearers. He makes these dues appear as personal losses which each of his hearers has suffered through the arrogance and selfishness of others; or he may set it forth in terms of self-sacrifice and devotion to a people or section of the people. Always it is the same subtle play on self-pity. It is an easy game to play because man is so prone to this particular form of evil.

If we examine the evil in our own experience, irrespective of its world-wide consequences, we can see how it blinds people to all other suffering and inconveniences apart from their own. Self-pity hardens a man and cuts him off from others more completely than any other vice. He can see only what affects him personally, and as that is always in some way connected with other people, he sees others as causes of his own discomfort. As long as he remains sorry for himself he cannot glimpse the other man's point of view. The other man remains a menace, a source of pain and unhappiness, an enemy. Even

God comes to be condemned as an enemy because he is regarded as the source of misfortune; even God is against the man who looks at his own suffering. Self-pity makes co-operation with others impossible; even those who are well disposed and who offer sympathy can only be used to support self in its bitter struggle against the rest of reality. . .

The story is familiar to anyone who has borne a grudge or harboured a grievance, and we all have self-pitying moments. Whatever the cause of this turning upon ourselves and our troubles, it is always an invitation to the Hitlers of today. Such men can make Nazis or Communists of almost any man once they have discovered the grievance and its cause.

And the Christian may not attempt to use such a weapon. On the contrary he must encourage exactly the opposite frame of mind—to forget one's own sufferings in seeking the happiness of all men and the glory of God. If he sorrows for himself, it is contrition for his own wilfulness and stupidity, or perhaps it is the quiet sorrow of longing for a greater love of, and union with, God. But the ills and injustices which cause him real distress are those of others, no matter of what race or creed. All men are his brothers and their unhappiness is a family 'affair' which must if possible be put straight by unselfish, generous giving. The Christian weeps with his brethren and forgets his own pains; above all he weeps with Mary over the Son of Man's pains and with her shares in the world's sacrifice.

This means that the Christian may never encourage a grievance against any man, and particularly must he avoid the feeling of self-pity in view of a people like the Russians. This is the danger of the black-and-white, almost territorial, divisions between good and evil. The constant condemnation of Russia as the power for ill which is threatening Christianity may deteriorate into a sense of fear, of grievance, if not of hatred. That would be to play the very game we condemn Russian communism for playing. The Christian must be certain that he feels compassion for his brethren before he indulges in righteous indignation. The Church must condemn the grossly inhuman systems which lead to all the horrors of Ogpus, Gestapos and the like. But such condemnation does not mean opposition to the men working in the system. There can be no class warfare or religious strife if one of the classes or one of the religions give itself in a spirit of love. The Christian has the task of calling forth the good in men, of unearthing the natural inclination to good which lies hidden in all. God offers grace to support the staggering natural powers, and it is only the cynic who believes that whereas the Communist can harp with ease on the worst instincts of man, the Christian's task of sanctifying the world is almost hopeless.

Such pessimism is surely unjustified. The only reason for its being

partially true is that the Christian so easily adopts the standards around him; he takes on a grievance, he does not see the evil in himself, and very shortly he is employing the same technique as his pagan foes instead of spreading the good news. At all costs the Christian must resist resentment; and if he would do that he must resist facile classifications into camps of the evil and the good.

People sometimes ask what they can do to help in a small way to establish a new peace. They think in terms of outward activities, and the task appears infinitely greater than any individual could compass even with the help of God's grace. But it is necessary always to begin at home, to make the first steps with one's own legs. If we are to achieve anything in a wider sphere we must seek peace first by overcoming pity, the wrong sort of pity which is called a grievance. If the Church is persecuted and such men as Archbishop Stepinac are unjustly condemned, Christians must be ready to go out to their persecutors with love, not to withdraw in distrust and hatred. We look for peace, not pity; for grace upon men, not grievance in a clique; and every Christian can contribute to that by never feeling sorry for himself, nor yet sorry in this self-centred way for those whom, identified with himself, he sees crushed under the Russian boot.

THE EDITOR

THE SCRIPTURES AS WORD OF GOD¹

THE Scriptures are God's Word spoken. They are not simply word *about* God, or about his Word or about his saving work. They *are* his Word, and therefore his work: for his Word is creative; what it says it thereby does. (In Hebrew, *Dabar* means both Word and matter, affair, etc.) The words of Scripture do not point to what God does; they *are* what he does. And it is necessary not so much to follow their guidance as to participate in their Mystery. So it is, analogously, of a creative work of art. For example, a poem does not refer to something apart from itself which one must apprehend: it *is* something, into which one must enter.

In the words of Scripture a mystery of creation is contained. They are intrinsically creative. And what is there already created is the mind of the Prophet who utters them. For the prophet is one who conceives the Word of God in his mind (in his 'heart'), by the power of the Spirit, and brings it forth, utters it. He possesses, that is to say he is really possessed by, the Word of God. The prophetic utterance of the Word of God involves a divine work of creation; it means that the Word of God has in some sense become incarnate.

¹ Originally a paper written to provide raw material for discussion; and reproduced here without alteration.