

## GOD AND THE NATIONAL STATE

God as a term denoting that which is ultimately real and absolutely valuational is simultaneously the necessary presupposition of all thought and action and also their ultimate goal. Yet, it is equally true that it is neither known nor even knowable in principle in the sense that any finite being or set of such beings may hope to know it in any determinate manner. Being generally conceived as beyond both space and time and transcending them in the sense that, even when considered as immanent in the world, it can never be regarded as completely revealed at any particular point in space or time, it cannot but be unknown and unknowable in the deepest sense of the word. Yet, however paradoxical the idea of God may be, it is a symbol of that which man as a self-conscious reflective being, who both knows and acts, has to encounter at every turn.

However, most action and thought presupposes not merely a thinker or an actor but rather a collectivity of thinkers and actors, that is, a plurality of such beings without whom it is impossible to conceive of the possibility of either knowledge or of action in any significant sense of the terms. The relationship to God, on the other hand, is primarily conceived in relation to the individual as *apart from* others. In the well known phrase of the mystics, it is the flight of the Alone to the Alone which defines the relationship. The relationship with God, or what may be called the turning of

human consciousness towards God is, in all traditions, a turning away from the world including the withdrawal from concern with other human beings as well as the concern with one's own embodied self, that is, the life of one's own body and mind, intellect and life. Even when traditional thinking about God has tried to make it relevant to man's concern with other beings as in the ideal of the *Bodhisattva* or in that of "loving one's neighbour", it has remained only at the periphery of religious thought rather than at its center and even when a religion has been primarily an affair of the community or group as in Islam, Judaism and Christianity as well as in some devotional sects in Hinduism where it is said that God is present where devotees sing his name, or where the community of faithfuls gathers together, others are always excluded, i.e., those who are not totally of the Faith or who do not belong to the group or the Church concerned.

The question, thus, has always been what to do with those who are outside the faith or who belong to a different one? What is the relation of the God of one's own community, faith or religion to those who do not believe in him and thus are outside the sect or church to which God is exclusively confined by his followers. The proselytizing religions have usually demanded from others conversion or death or some sort of inferior status in society if they could not be converted or eliminated. Even those religions which fundamentally believe that each group or person has a right to have a God of his own choice, normally feel that they have a positive superiority to those members of the community or society who believe in some other God, or choose a form of God which is other than their own.

Yet, however great the problem of reconciling the universality which any concept of God inevitably claims for itself and the equally inevitable pluralistic situation in which diverse churches and religions find themselves, there is the other deeper problem with respect to the community which at least formally believes in the same God. The relations between human beings or between groups and states belonging to the same religion do not seem to be any better than those which are found between believers in different religions. Being a Muslim or a Christian or a Hindu does not in any significant way lead to a type of behaviour towards others of the same religion which may be regarded as distinct from the

behaviour one displays towards persons belonging to a religion other than one's own except in the marginal sense that one is perhaps less likely to come into intimate contact with them. The history of relations between states and kingdoms belonging to the same religion does not offer striking evidence of any difference in their behaviour ascribable to the fact that they professed the same identical religion. Rather, like individuals in conflict, they invoke the same God for the preferment of their own ends.

The problem thus may be posed in a threefold manner: one concerning God and His relationship with an individual in his personal, private and innermost life, a relationship which has only a marginal influence on one's empirical life which primarily consists of life in society and with relationship to others. The second may be regarded as concerned with the relationship between God and social groups or communities in which men live in society. The third may be regarded as a relationship between God and the political units which in modern times consist of nation-states.

As far as the first is concerned, even if the idea of God makes any relevant difference in one's empirical life, it does so primarily through the individual in his private, personal capacity alone. On the other hand, when he functions in a public capacity which is essentially representative in character, he has inevitably to express in some particular specific form the interests of all those who subscribe to diverse forms of religion, if the society happens to be multi-religious in character. This may assume either the form of allowing each to pursue his or her own path provided it does not come into conflict with others, a situation which is in principle possible only if the other also believes in the same principle. But how can the relation between nation-states be governed by a consciousness of God which necessarily transcends and encompasses the difference between the nation-states themselves?

In a certain sense bringing God into any discussion is to close it in an essential sense though, from another point of view, it is true that it also makes us aware of the parochial limitations of the discussion and helps us realise the arbitrariness of the boundaries we ourselves had set. To bring the consideration of God in any consideration of the relation between nation-states or between any other groups or set of groups, whether religious or non-religious, is to bring an awareness to all concerned that they should think

about issues from the viewpoint of the other and ultimately, perhaps, from the viewpoint of that which transcends not merely themselves but the other also.

There is, however, an aspect of the matter which unless we take note of it would make our discussion superficial and blind towards an essential feature of the situation. The relation between nation-states, or even between groups, is mediated by persons who act not on their own but in a representative capacity, that is, as essentially responsible for persons other than themselves rather than as persons responsible for their own selves. The difference between private and the public is overriding in this regard and as Hannah Arendt has pointed out so well, the realm of the polity is the realm of the public *par excellence*. Of course, she emphasized the negative aspect of the term "private" which no religion can accept as, in the religious context, the term "private" denotes the most meaningful experience that has been known to man up until now. In fact, the positive sense of the term "private" in modern times relates it primarily to what is called one's life, not for God, but in relation to other human beings with whom one has affective relationships. In fact, the hard core of what is regarded as "private" is basically what one concerns oneself with and wherein one is primarily responsible to oneself. The reference to others is not only minimal but basically instrumental. Ultimately, one is concerned with oneself alone.

The "private" thus does not belong to the realm of morals where one is primarily concerned with others and not with what happens to oneself. But even the realm of morals is primarily concerned with the relationship between individuals or persons. The relations between groups or between an individual and a group are not exactly defined in terms of moral values but rather in terms of rules which tend to define the structure of essentially undefined and unstructured relationships in this domain. The problem of institutional morality, i.e., the problem of morality in the interaction between institutions has not been explored to the same extent as has been done with regards to individual morality. The reason why relationships between institutions mostly happen to be of a negative character relates to the fact that the relationship is primarily one of competition rather than cooperation. And even when it is a relation of cooperation, it is only in the context of interests rather

than values and that, too, only temporarily till it suits the parties concerned. The heart of morality, on the other hand, lies in the sacrifice of interests for the sake of values and the sacrifice of one's interests for the sake of the interests of others or for the value or values that they pursue.

These sacrifices which are involved in the very nature of value may be accepted in the context of interaction between persons, but can never be given even a marginal place in the relationship between organisations. In the case of institutions, to sacrifice one's interests would be almost tantamount to what has come to be called "treason" in the political domain. Yet, if considerations of God, that is, considerations pertaining to value and reality that transcend one's own group are to be brought to bear on the thinking about relations between nation-states then a fundamental change will have to occur in the way we conceive of these relations and the terms in which we describe them and the criteria by which we judge or evaluate them. The task of formulating these terms and these criteria seems to me to be the central one which all persons who seriously entertain the idea of God must undertake nowadays.

The relations between nation-states, or even between different polities in the past which did not conceive of themselves as nations in the modern sense, have always been governed by the idea of potential hostility between them. Basically, the terms in which this relationship has been conceived are those of "victor" and "vanquished", "conqueror" and "conquered". Even in cases where, as in certain traditions in Ancient India, the relationship has been conceived of in terms of suzerainty rather than sovereignty, the ideal for any polity has always been imperialist expansion, the conquering of other territories, the idea of a *Chakravartin*, i.e., of a ruler whose sway is acknowledged by all, even if *de facto* control is left to the previous rulers of the countries or the regions concerned. It was always considered the duty of a king to expand his frontiers and the domain of his rule as far as possible. The neighbouring kingdoms, therefore, were always to be treated not as allies or friends but rather as enemies, a theory fully formulated in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, the ancient Indian treatise on the science and art of politics.

It is perhaps to the credit of modern times that this doctrine which seemed so self-evident to political thinkers in the past has

not only been questioned but regarded as unacceptable. However, a change in rhetoric does not necessarily mean that the realities have also changed. The notion of spheres of influence elaborated in recent times and the emergence of the notion of client states whose support and vote one may always count upon are eloquent reminders of the fact that the ghost of the past has not been completely exorcized from the political practice of nations even today. Yet, it is equally true that the rights of autonomy, independence and non-interference are claimed and acknowledged at least on the verbal level by most nations in the present, and that the very notion of neo-colonialism underlines the fact that control of other states or even the influencing of their policies is to be achieved these days by means different from those that were not only prevalent in the past but also accepted as correct. Not only this, the fact of large scale aid, both military and economic, is a witness to the fact that nation-states today are supposed to have obligations to other nation-states, which they are expected to fulfill and in case they do not do so, they are subjected to censure as having done something which they ought not to have done. It is true that all the attempts for building a new international economic order have failed to make any headway in spite of repeated meetings on the subject and that most nations have not felt it either desirable or feasible to fulfill their obligations in this regard. Still, it is a fact that all nations today do subscribe some money to international organisations which in their turn do perform certain international functions, including giving aid to those who need or require it. There are also large bilateral agreements which are expected to achieve the same purpose, though perhaps with more direct political implications than in the case of the former. It is imperative, therefore, that certain criteria and norms be laid down for the conditions and forms that bilateral, multi-lateral or international aid may take in modern times.

The relation between nation-states have to be thought of in more positive terms and the first precondition of that is that they should be conceived of in relation to the good or welfare of the other state rather than the interest of one's own state. Of course, there would always be the perennial problem of how to distinguish between the good of the people from the good of those who happen to be the rulers of that state at that time. The problem, in a sense, arises

with respect to one's own state also as any one who rules tends to identify his own interests with that of the people over whom he rules. The problem is difficult to resolve and it may be true that even when one's actions towards another state are guided primarily not by reference to the good of one's state, it is difficult to decide as to how the good of the other state is to be conceived. In many cases, especially where other states are ruled by tyrants, it may be difficult not to act in a manner where one's action may be seen as going against the interests of the other state.

To take a concrete example, how would one regard India's military intervention in support of the revolt in East Pakistan against the Pakistan authorities, an intervention which led to the creation of the free state of Bangla Desh out of dismemberment of the former state of Pakistan comprising both West and East Pakistan? If one thinks only in terms of nation-states as formal entities and their interest in those terms, then it is obvious that the Indian intervention cannot be regarded as governed by the good of the nation-state of Pakistan. But if the interests of the nation-state are seen in terms of the interests of the people, then a different conclusion would have to be drawn. The logic of the argument however can always be stretched to the extreme where all interventions, whether military or non-military, may be formally justified in the name of the interests of the people as has been done by the revolutionary subversion in the so-called interests of the people by Communist regimes all over the world. In fact, the safeguarding of democracy has led perhaps to as many interventions in recent history as the safeguarding of socialism.

Still, it may be hazarded that any type of aid that makes a country self-reliant and learn doing things for itself is a type of action that could be regarded as motivated by the desire to do good for that country. It is, of course, true that even this minimal concept raises problems both at the theoretical and applied levels. At the theoretical level, the concept of self-reliance leads ultimately to the notion of monads which are completely windowless and thus closed to all influences from outside and thus leads to a world where there is no interaction between different entities—a situation which can hardly be considered desirable from either the moral or the social point of view. In applied fields, it leads to the notion of autarchy and a denial of the possibility of enrichment by inter-

change with others. In fact, the concept of dependence itself seems to require a thorough analysis in the context of relations both between individuals and those between groups and nation-states.

But, however difficult it may be to understand these concepts in an unambiguous manner, it is fairly clear that there is a type of interchange in the relationship both between persons as well as groups which are asymmetrically situated in terms of knowledge or power or wealth which is of such a nature as to decrease the asymmetry to some extent and, at a deeper level, to foster those capacities which lead them not only to grow on their own but also innovate in new directions so that each is not merely helpful to itself but also contributes to the growth and development of the erstwhile superior party in the relationship. Perhaps, the concepts of self-reliance and interdependence have to be supplemented by concepts of enrichment and innovation. The relationship between nation-states has been seen too much in terms of the asymmetries of power or wealth and not in such a multi-faceted manner that no country is regarded as superior to another in all respects, and that each is superior to the other only in some aspects and each has always something to give and take in a process of mutual enrichment leading to the growth of mankind as a whole.

It is well known that a teacher learns from his students almost as much as the students learn from him, even though the process of learning in the two cases is very different. But it is not so well recognised that groups and nations are in the same situation, even if not to the same extent. A self-conscious awareness of this dimension of interchange between cultures and notions may perhaps lead to a different view of the relations between them than the notions prevalent at present help to foster.

The infusion of the awareness of God in the relation between nation-states or rather even the raising of the issue or bringing the two concepts together into a common focus is basically to challenge human awareness to make an attempt to transcend its narrow parochial concerns, as well as to think not only in terms of humanity as a whole but also to widen one's awareness in the attempt to comprehend the totality and feel responsible towards it. The concepts of "collective responsibility" and "responsibility towards a collectivity" have to be explored in greater depth than has been done up until now in human thought.



The awareness of God or rather of that which is symbolised by the term normally takes man away from a concern with temporal reality, particularly that which is socio-political in nature and is involved in history and time. Some recent thinkers like Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin have tried to remedy this defect in traditional thought that has concerned itself seriously with the religious dimension of human experience. But even they have not dealt with the problems raised by nation-states and the interrelationships between them or by the fact that an individual is not a world citizen yet but a citizen of only some one particular country rather than another.

The recent issues in the theory of choice and welfare have primarily been conceived of in terms of the policies of nation-states with respect to the welfare of their own citizens. How these policies will affect the welfare of the citizens of other countries is usually ignored in the debate. There is much thought regarding the adoption of policies that lead to the betterment of the least advantaged member or group in societies. But there is very little talk of adopting policies that are to the advantage of the least advantaged nations in the world. How far the thinking in the social sciences is still determined by the realities of the nation-state and one's subconscious identification with it is seen by the conspicuous absence of any sustained discussion regarding the achievement of welfare not within nation-states but between nation-states.

The popularity of the rhetoric of freedom and welfare shows the immense influence of liberal and socialist thought in the political domain. But there is no comparable rhetoric which could be said to pervade the talk about the relations between nations. There is, of course, the talk of non-interference in each other's affairs and agreements of trade and cultural exchanges, but beyond these there is little else. It only shows that international relations are conceived more in terms of problems of power generated by facts of the geo-political situation of countries, as well as the world power structure obtaining at a particular time. It is, of course, a fact that much rhetoric most of the time is *only* rhetoric but one should not forget that it is also evidence of the fact that those are the values accepted by the consciousness of both the elite and the illiterate masses at large and that, however half-heartedly, there is an attempt by the governing states to justify themselves by the actions

they undertake towards the realisation of those values. Similarly, if the considerations urged above are brought to bear on our thinking about the relations between nation-states, it may result in the adoption of a new rhetoric which would at least give some indication of what *ought* to obtain in these relationships.

It may be asked why we should bring in the notion of God to do this job. Would it not be better if we used some other word to convey the same idea? After all, many people are allergic to the word itself and most people tend to interpret it in the way they have been brought to understand it through the respective religions in which they happened to be born. There is substance in this criticism, and all that I can say is that for any person genuinely interested in religion the notion of God refers to something that transcends the particular religion to which he belongs and that anyone who is concerned with the world in however small a measure and feels some obligation towards it would try to bring the two concerns together, one of which is primarily concerned with the transcendent and the other with the world. Yet, as everybody knows, what ultimately matters is not the world but what it *means* to us and what we *do* to it and the concern of this paper has been to bring into one focus these two ultimate concerns of man. The former is symbolized by that which is denoted in most traditions by the term "God" or its equivalent and the latter by some such terms as "society" or "state". The two, society and state, are not the same, but not only have they tended to become increasingly identical in recent times, but the overriding importance of the state over society in an era where planning, development and welfare have become the central concerns of the polity is there for everyone to see. So it is the latter which has begun to preponderate in the context of action and hence "God" and the "nation-states" are the two poles of man's seeking at present and it has been the purpose of this paper to bring the two into active interrelationship with each other and suggest the possibility of a meaningful interaction between the two.

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