

## THE CHRISTIAN LEADER IN POLITICS

A FOOTNOTE TO 'CATHOLICS AND MODERN POLITICS'

**B**ERTRAND RUSSELL stated the fundamental problem of politics succinctly and in practical form at the beginning of his Reith Lectures with the question: 'How can we combine that degree of individual initiative which is necessary for progress with the degree of social cohesion that is necessary for survival?' It may be that the distinction that he makes is too clear cut and that there are circumstances where individual initiative is not anarchic or where the particular form of social cohesion imposed carries in itself the seeds of nihilism. Nonetheless, one cannot but agree with Russell when he suggests that the three primary aims of government are security, justice and conservation.

A far too simplistic approach to world politics, of which Russell himself is to some degree guilty, would equate the system in which individual initiative predominates with 'the American way of life', and the system where social cohesion is created and maintained by unparalleled means of force with the U.S.S.R., and indeed with most of the satellite countries of Eastern Europe. The latter system, almost *ex hypothesi*, is stable with the monolithic rigidity of fanatical adherence to a doctrine, a messianic doctrine, that must be made to work out in practice. On the other hand, the American system is constantly undergoing changes which bring it nearer to being a balance between the two extremes. (It must not be thought that I am concerned to defend the American way of life—I would merely point out that it is constantly undergoing modifications, and cannot be reckoned static as is the doctrinaire Stalinist position.) The most recent example, perhaps, is the anti-inflation bill by which Mr Truman, flexing the muscles of his new-found strength, has threatened to put the Federal Government in business for itself if individual initiative (i.e. private enterprise) fails to produce all that the Government thinks that it should produce.

However, this tension between State and individual is not something that is restricted to the economic sphere. There have been recent examples from Russia of the way in which it can penetrate into every part of life: into the arts, with the pathetic sight of the abject Shostakovitch trying desperately to confine his musical genius to the strait-jacket of the party line; into the sciences, with the charlatan Lysenko making sure of the triumph of his theories by the vilification and even removal of his opponents.

All of this poses a problem for the Christian, not directly *qua* Christian for there is no ideal Christian political and economic system, but as a man of this day and age engaged and plunged in

the temporal, with the duty of practising the social virtues and with the privilege of joining in the redemption of all created things. Too often the role of Christian leaders has seemed to have been that of ineffectual watchdogs, crying out when individual initiative has been exaggerated to the point of freedom from all restraint, even moral restraint, or giving tongue when the growth of State authority has too greatly circumscribed the possibilities of personal freedom. This negative and defensive process is undoubtedly necessary, but when unaccompanied by any positive action it has tended to produce the impression that the Christian is always out of step with the movements of his time. To that extent the possibility of positive influence is diminished, and the Christian is willy-nilly placed in the false position of defending a *status quo* for which, neither in virtue of his faith nor his reason, he need necessarily hold any brief.

There are times and places when social pressure is such that the Christian can do no more than resist silently, when the means of political opposition are ruthlessly suppressed. All that is then left is faith in the indefectibility of the Church, and its proof from the manner in which the Church has survived all political changes, the Roman Empire, the Gothic invasion, the wars of religion. Undoubtedly, that is the situation of many Christians in Eastern Europe today. The tide of totalitarianism slowly rolls westward, and politics is more often than not reduced to the simple alternative of conformism or the labour camp. While there is no inevitability about the evolution of the historical process, events in Eastern Europe should remind us that history does go forward and not backward. We are present in the historical process of the twentieth century, and our concern should not be with the errors of the nineteenth still less with the dubious advantages of earlier ages of faith. One unnecessary and dangerously cumbersome piece of baggage that we must shed in our journey into the future is the hope of a return to the Christian State of old. As Don Sturzo has written, 'The Christian State of the twentieth century could be neither the corporative State of the Middle Ages nor the confessional State of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, nor the Union of Throne and Altar of the Restoration on the Continent. Today we have the totalitarian dictatorship, or the democracies of a liberal type, or the intermediate and ambiguous forms which end by becoming unstable and arbitrary governments or transitory and anarchic demagogues.'

Yet, all this confusion, oppression, cold war and the rest in which these different political systems are involved does not betoken

a world that is disintegrating but rather a world that is struggling to be born. The effects of Renaissance, Reformation and Revolution, some of them cohesive and some disruptive, have run their course and the fields of religion, economics and politics are now the prey of new forces. All of them have one feature in common, the urge to unity, to make one world either economically with the American productive process at the centre, or politically with the Kremlin at the centre, or religiously with Christ as the Head of the Body. Hence, the first duty of the Christian is *to be present* in this unifying process, not as a dissenter or a *laudator temporis acti* but as an alert citizen technically qualified to make his contribution. Cardinal Suhard emphasises this point: 'The time has come when the greatest service that can be rendered to the Church and her children is to make the "Christian summa" of the world in formation. The greatest error of the Christians of the twentieth century, and one its children would not forgive them, would be to let the world take shape and unite without them, without God—or against him. . . . It will perhaps be the greatest honour of our time to have started what others will carry through: a humanism in proportion to the world and God's plan.'

The second condition for the Christian in politics is that he should never look on political problems as merely matters of administration removed from the Christian ethic. Here is found in its most acute form the effects of the divorce between religion and life; here too is the field of conflict between the Christian and the modern State. The Church's effort is to say to her children that they must be Christ-like in all things, whether as judges, as legislators, as civil servants or as citizens. On the other hand, the State (whether explicitly or not) tries to separate the two, to make them two independent spheres of life and of action. That it has succeeded is obvious when a Catholic, moved either by nationalist or class prejudice, says boldly that he is prepared to take his religion from Rome but not his politics. It was said by Irish nationalists in the last century, and it is said today by Catholics turned Communist in England and by die-hard capitalists in the United States of America.

The starting point for the Christian must be the Redemption, the conviction that humanism (including politics) is not opposed to Christianity but rather is to be redeemed by it with all its values and virtues. Once this is accepted the opportunity presented to the Christian takes on the form of a magnificent challenge. The Christian approach will be 'receptive and open to very diverse values, in which error is often mixed with truth. A complex effort,

it will have to resist human tendencies, now collectivised, which are bad; the exclusive seeking of profit and pleasure, the worship of force, a passive attitude to propaganda of hate, division, etc. But at the same time we must integrate into a religious perspective: good and authentic human values, the growth of social organisation, the renewal and transformation of the world by all the intellectual, technical and aesthetic efforts of the last centuries, the ever increasing conscious affirmation of a universal human solidarity.' There was a time, not so very long ago, when the mere use of the word 'international' in the title of an organisation or society was enough to damn it in the eyes of many Christians. Similarly the use of the word 'worker' even today makes the *bien-pensant* think straight away of Communism. (This has actually been the experience of members of the Young Christian Workers within the last few months when trying to sell their paper *The Young Worker!*) What a tragedy that the two great currents of our time, international unity and the rise of the workers have been so abandoned to the non-Christian that the Christian takes it for granted. There is obviously room for presence, and actively Christian presence, in these movements of our time.

Cardinal Suhard speaks of 'the growth of social organisation' and is undoubtedly referring to the great increase of measures of socialisation of one form and another in all the countries of the world, even those most removed ideologically from totalitarianism. They are not all good nor are they all bad, and it is for the Christian with the technical competence in each particular sphere to disentangle the good from the bad, and to develop the good. To take the most extreme example, one cannot categorically dismiss all that has happened in Russia since the Revolution as unequivocally evil. Some of the reforms that have been carried out in Eastern Europe, though their manner has been harsh and at times overwhelmingly inhuman, have been for the greater good of the peoples living there. This must be borne in mind when making political judgments. Opposition to necessary reforms will come from those who, often, have been the inhuman oppressors of the masses of worker. It has not been unknown in recent years for capitalists to finance propaganda drives against Communism under the guise of standing for Christian principles, of which naturally the chief is that of private property. If Christians lend themselves to this manoeuvre they run the danger of compromising themselves in the eyes of those whom they should be influencing. The Christians in a given country cannot hope to pose as the leaders of the workers, or challenge the claim of the Communists, if it is known that their funds are augmented

by considerable contributions from well-known ex-Nazis.

The Christian, then, must be free from attachments to any interests except those which are of his time and place. His opposition must be selective, and for every idea or fact opposed he must be prepared to offer an alternative. The trend of the time towards collectivisation is not, in general, completely doctrinaire but is the effort of men conditioned by the ideas of the age to find solutions to human problems. Those same problems, and practical solutions to them, must harass and oppress the Christian. 'To convert the world', says Cardinal Suhard, 'it is not enough to be saints, and preach the Gospel. Rather one cannot be a saint and live the Gospel we preach without spending himself to provide every one with the housing, employment, food, leisure, education, etc., without which life is no longer human.' In other words, the Christian must see his spiritual progress incarnated in social and human progress—the advance of the restoration of all things in Christ.

One effect of the swing of the pendulum away from excessive freedom (including the freedom to starve) of the liberal politics and economics of the last century towards what may become excessive socialisation (social security and no freedom) is the breakdown of the old structures of government. This is accentuated by our form of mass society where, in the classic phrase, contract has been substituted for status and each man's individuality is to a great extent submerged in the herd. The danger lies in strong central governments appropriating to themselves more and more power over the lives and even the thoughts of their citizens, with no possibility of restraint or protest. This revolutionary process is at work in all the countries of the world. Hitherto revolution has always signified breaking out of bonds, the barricades, the battle for freedom, but today's revolution is in the opposite direction. It is towards an increase of the 'social cohesion' and a decrease of the 'individual initiative' of which Bertrand Russell speaks. It is not perhaps realised that in this country the whole framework inside which our political system operated is changing. The political parties of the nineteenth century agreed in general on the kind of economic system they wanted and inside which they would work. Professor Laski prophesied that once Labour came into power this framework would have to go, and he was right. Socialisation, nationalisation and control are now scrambling eggs which will probably never be unscrambled.

The great need is for a new élite in the body politic, men at every level of society who will be poles round which opinion can crystallise. It has been suggested by some, notably the American

James Burnham, that these leaders of tomorrow will come from the managerial class, i.e. that our revolution is the managerial revolution. This has not been borne out by events. It would seem that in Russia there is a new aristocracy which is an élite of the technician, but this aristocracy has no great political power. The Christian's opportunity, and duty, is to work to become part and a dominating part of the new élite which has not yet emerged, but which must come very largely from among the workers. One of the elements in this ferment of revolution is the rise to power of the workers of the world. If they are not to be bound by chains of their own forging there must be a growth of leadership which will offset, and even arrest, the excesses of collectivisation. Moreover, the leaders who arise must have nothing of the demagogue about them, have no tinge of the *Führerprinzip*, but be leaders in virtue of their technical competence and their love of, and desire to serve, their fellow men. From their inspiration and leadership must come the communities of the future, and of these the most fundamental is the family.

The task of the Christian in politics is to work for security, justice and the conservation of all that is good, and as the method of securing these things at present is through a diminution of individual initiative he must be at pains to provide spheres of freedom where man's humanity and perfection can flourish, communities which will keep off the pressure of mass society and will enable men to overcome the atomising effect of the world of yesterday. But it must be begun quickly. 'The "children of light" are too often less clever than the "sons of darkness"'. This condition does not spring from any precept of the Lord. To be late with an idea may be a fact, it is not a virtue.'

JOHN FITZSIMONS .

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## RACIAL POLICIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

SINCE wartime days South Africa has been faced, both at home and abroad, with a rising tide of feeling and opinion which demands a solution to its problems of population groups, European, African, Cape Coloured and Indian, on lines in accordance with justice and Christianity. It is no longer possible to look upon the Non-White peoples as perpetually or indefinitely condemned to be servants and labourers; and such views, common in the press ten years ago, are now rarely seen. All parties realise that only a policy that gives full justice and opportunity will have any hope of