

THE temporal and moral chaos, so uniformly evident in the world today, gives clear and undeniable proof of the necessity of moral standards external to, and therefore independent of, the caprice of man. This chaos, of which only the material results are brought home to us with adequate reality, is the direct and unavoidable result of the acceptance of the theory that man is capable of legislating for himself in the moral sphere. Indeed, the deepest of truths is expressed in the oft-quoted statement that the most cogent proof of the divine origin of and the necessity of mankind for the ten commandments is given by the results which follow their being cast aside. In like manner some external, ultimate and unchangeable standards are necessary in the fields of economics and politics, sciences which of their essence have reference to man in relation to his fellows and to the physical world. These must be ultimate and unchangeable because, in his physical nature, man has unchanging fundamental needs; external, because it is by its success or failure in satisfying these very needs and not those invented by the fickle desires of the individual that any political or economic system must be judged. By what standards are we to measure such a system, what gauge are we to apply to its propositions in order that our appreciation of it may be true and our judgment just?

It will easily be seen that no sincere and genuine answer can be given to this question without direct reference to the ultimate belief of the individual person: it cannot be answered in the same way as can a question relating to, say, tastes or preferences, which are very often fickle and ephemeral. But the standard by which a man orders his life or the object towards which he directs all his efforts cannot be subject to such change; his very nature rebels against it. The man who has no all-embracing end towards which he is striving, which to him is more important than all other objects (even if it be only his own glorification or the enjoyment of as much pleasure as possible during his span of life) is usually the one who ends it all by jumping off a bridge. Let us be quite clear about it, no man can live without some fundamental purpose, noble or ignoble, hellish or heavenly. This transcendence of one ideal over all others is what we call 'Religion' and it is clear that the nature of this religion shapes more or less completely all conduct and intellectual vision. This is the reason why the question of political and economic standards is such a fundamental one. When man is living in a society, whether it be the family or the state, the two most important temporal problems with which he has to deal are those of the production and distribution of wealth and of his relations with his fellows—and his attitude

towards these is governed by his religious belief. For these reasons questions such as, 'Is classical music preferable to what passes as music today?' or 'What are one's reactions to Picasso's art?' can usually be answered offhandedly; in the majority of people they merely touch the surface. But, 'Is Socialism good?' 'Was not Feudalism bad?' cannot be answered in a superficial manner—they penetrate the surface; they dig down to the foundations, they ask of man what does he regard as the end of human life? In the same way as measurements of length are directly related to the standard bar which is the fundamental unit, so will our economic and political judgments be deduced from what we believe to be ultimately true. And therefore it must follow that if religious beliefs differ, conceptions and ideals in these matters differ. The pure materialist, who takes the world as he finds it and believes that perfect happiness can be achieved in time and that the infinite cravings of the human heart can be satisfied by material things only, will have for his standard the well-known phrase, first given currency by Jeremy Bentham, 'The greatest happiness of the greatest number'. The young Bolshevik idealist, whose heart has been touched by the poverty and squalor he has seen, and who holds it as his supreme achievement to help in establishing the new egalitarian order, will judge such a system by its proximity to the Muscovite conception of right and wrong in these matters. The judgment of the Christian will be based upon the tenets of his faith and the teachings of the Church. Looking upon his earthly home as only a temporary one, and with his eyes fixed, however blinking, upon the City of God as the goal of all his endeavours, he recognises with St Augustine that our hearts are restless till they rest in God. Although the fallibility and weakness of the human intellect may render his judgment erroneous, nevertheless it is built upon sure foundations and measured by true standards.

From the political or economic points of view the fundamental doctrine of Christianity is its insistence upon the supernatural vocation of mankind, that is, the teaching that while man has many proximate ends he has but one final end—the possession of God. To attain great renown as a statesman or a thinker, to amass great wealth and to be able to look back upon a life of continued material success—for none of these was man born into the world, but for an end far higher and far greater, towards the attainment of which these circumstances may be great stepping-stones or great barriers. That our strivings will find no complete fulfilment in this discovered country but in an undiscovered one is for the Christian the key to human life. It has but one fundamental purpose and only what gives effect to this purpose can have ultimate value in our eyes. We run, therefore, that we may

obtain not an earthly prize but a heavenly one; we hold that man's progress is towards this latter goal and not towards a worldly millennium. This is our fundamental belief in regard to human existence and it follows of necessity from this belief that we judge any social system as good or bad to the extent in which it tends to the furtherance or retardation of man's spiritual progress. And so we approve of a certain system not *alone*—and here '*alone*' is the operative word and must be stressed—not *alone* because it gives security or good housing conditions or whatever it is that it does give, but inasmuch as these things help towards the Kingdom of Heaven which is the object of our primary search.

We can now examine our criterion and investigate some of its practical applications. The most obvious characteristic of the christian standard is that it is pre-eminently a standard of the mean. It asserts the transcendence of the spiritual and at the same time defends the importance of material circumstance. In fact perhaps the most lasting memory of the first reading of any book on Catholic dogma is of the constant reiteration of the doctrine of balance between the spiritual and material worlds. It is to be expected, therefore, that such a standard will be open to attack from two sides—from the camp of those who glory in the spiritual and decry matter as being a degradation of the true order, and also from those who can see no order higher than that of the visible creation. Indeed, this is revealed in the history of the Church. One of the most dangerous enemies of true Christianity has always been the heresy of Gnosticism under one name or another, which holds that all matter and all pleasure, especially that of the body, are evil. It is clear that Gnostic or Manichean theory can have no sympathy with the idea that the way in which a man obtains his bread and butter, or whether he gets any at all, has a profound influence upon his spiritual life. Nor can it expect any mercy from those who deny the very existence of such a life. If it is true that over a great part of the world today pre-occupation with temporal affairs has caused men to lose touch with the things of the supernatural order which meant so much in the life of a Christian in the Middle Ages, it is no less true to say that the medievals were so intent upon the world to come that they paid rather too little attention to the world that was already there, and to the plight of great numbers of their fellows in that world. Balance and compromise please neither party unless each abandons the extreme and conforms itself to the *aurea media*.

Secondly, although Gnosticism under one form or another has always been among the most insidious of heresies, nevertheless in modern times the greatest danger may be found to come from the

other extreme. It would be difficult to persuade the social worker of any experience that the ills of our time spring from a too strict interpretation of the teachings of Christ! We must therefore accept as inevitable that, although the standard of the spiritual progress of man is the Christian standard, and the only true standard by which a social system is to be measured, it will always tend to be obscured by the more immediately attractive doctrine of the materialist outlook upon life. The reason why this certainty is not so fearsome a prospect as the tendency towards 'ultra-spirituality', if one might call it so, is that too great pre-occupation with material things usually comes from human weakness or sensuality and not from pride, which is the food upon which the former feeds—that is, there may be no complete mis-orientation of purpose. In this context the relative justification of the two men who went up into the Temple to pray sums up the two extremes.

This tendency of materialism to obscure the christian standard of social values is not ephemeral, but a consequence of original sin, lasting from Eden to Armageddon. The world which we see with the eye of the body must tend to seem more real than the world which we see with the eye of faith; the things that are Cæsar's will tend to obscure the things that are not. But these tendencies cannot affect the truthfulness of our standard any more than the propensity of a statue to collect dust renders it any the less a statue. We cannot blame the statue if the air in which it stands is dust-filled, nor can we blame the standard if our minds are dim and cobwebbed. Though we may forget and neglect it, and judge with an eye to the present time only; though the corruptible crown may gleam more brightly in its newness than the dust-collecting incorruptible one, yet in the final analysis we can be left in no doubt as to which is which.

It is this fundamental conception of ultimates which marks the difference between the christian statesman and his pagan colleague. While the latter is of necessity striving for an earthly and material millennium, the former holds that material progress is only part of the ideal for which he seeks, a consideration of secondary importance. The one holds as an inviolable principle that he is called to legislate for the caravan until it reaches the clover-covered Elysian fields; the other deems it his duty to bring the clover to the caravan. And this is where the adherents of utilitarianism took the wrong turning. Judged superficially the phrase 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' seems to be the ideal starting-point of any social or economic system. As Bentham himself said: 'In this phrase I saw delineated for the first time a plain as well as a true standard for whatever is right or wrong, useful, useless or mischievous whether in the field of

morals or politics'. But if the conception of what constitutes true human happiness is false, if the idea of what makes for the satisfaction of all human desires is not a true idea, (as it was not in the case of Bentham and his disciples) then the edifice of thought erected upon such an erroneous foundation is as the house built upon sand, and great indeed will be the inevitable fall thereof. If the felicity from which we are absenting ourselves is held to be in created things merely, if we consider ourselves as members of a race perfectible in time, proceeding towards an atomic Utopia of mass-produced washing machines, television sets, and canned food and recreation, the development of political thought and economic thought must of necessity be along the lines we have known and of which we have had experience. On the other hand, the acceptance of the christian doctrine that the things of the spirit take precedence over those of the material world will ensure that such development will take place along entirely different lines. And it must not be considered for a moment that such a change of outlook would result in a lackadaisical attitude towards worldly affairs. To say this is tantamount to saying that a junior official in a manufacturing concern is not the more efficient for knowing what is the product of the company, and what is the object of its existence. In fact the knowledge and love of the true end of man is the only force which is capable of setting the tremendous untapped wells of human energy gushing forth into action. Humanitarianism and sentiment, those two fundamental supports of modern political thought, are not sufficient to stir the human heart sufficiently deeply. Appeals on hoardings and promises of increased wages can never get houses built as quickly or as well as can the presence of some tremendously moving ideal in the mind of the planner and the bricklayer. Only when the administrator has himself found the pearl of great price, only when the desire to share the riches which he has found has taken possession of him, will he throw all the resources at his disposal into the struggle to provide for all his fellows the material conditions necessary so that they too may gain what he has gained, and find what he has found.

The present struggle between conflicting political ideologies, and between contesting theories in the field of economics, is in large measure due to the multiplicity of standards, each offering some basis for conjecture. Christian life, the relationship between God and man, is full of paradoxes. Perhaps the greatest of them all is the paradox that it is only when our gaze is steadily fixed upon the world to come that all the seemingly irreconcilable difficulties of present existence fall into their proper perspective and become intelligible.

W. V. KINGSTON