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## THE BASIS OF SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION

A CHILD playing with wooden bricks will happily knock over his construction and then earnestly and hastily build up another tottering house that is to last no longer than its predecessor. At present we are like the child feverishly trying to pick up the bits, even while they are still falling, to set to work on some new arrangement of the same material. Society must receive all our attention. It has fallen to pieces and so with all the king's horses and all the king's men we are trying to put it together again.

Sir William Beveridge dominates the playroom of the rebuilders and his Report presents the most comprehensive of all the hundreds of plans for the next tottering structure. But the materials are much the same as before only a little more pronounced in their shape. Praise is due to the Report as well as to its author for its high aims as well as for the knowledge and industry that has given it birth. Social security for the whole nation, freedom from want and disease, employment for all, to bring such blessings within reach of each citizen in the Kingdom explains the almost unanimous acclamation it has received. For many years now the Popes have been proposing a new way of life that will bring security for low as well as high.

The Christian will naturally wonder whether the high ideal of Security can be reached by a single economist without reference to the religion of Christ. If he is assured of the practicability of the scheme, he may rightly wonder whether the security he has been looking for is the same as Sir William Beveridge has found. For it is possible to secure a person from outside, tucking him up in bed as it were. Barriers can be placed across every dangerous road; the evil tendency of man to abuse property can be met with a curtailment of his power to own, his inclination to be self-centred can be legislated for so that he is bound to 'give' time and money to society. He can be hedged round with safeguards until he finds himself in the security of a prison cell. The Americans experimented with this type of social security in the small matter of alcoholic drink; the Socialist would attack property in the same spirit. These children will use the same bricks.

There are other ideals of security, where a man's will is encouraged to act freely for good things so that barriers can *safely* be thrown down rather than multiplied. This sort of security comes primarily from a thorough education. A strengthening of the person himself is required; and commentators of the Report have already pointed out that its success depends on psychological factors. A merely secular education that informs the mind of facts and figures will not suffice, but only an education which draws the soul of man to love the Good for its own sake. And the Good in itself is God, the God whose Son was born into human society nineteen and a half centuries ago. Naturally the Christian turns to his religion as the only basis upon which true security can be built, for that alone can stabilise the will in the Good.

In all matters where religion meets society great care is demanded in formulating the truth, particularly in these days when principles have been obscured. The right of the Archbishop of Canterbury to speak officially on social matters has been attacked in many quarters—one result of our secularist education. If precision is required in the relation of Church and State still more ought the evident necessity of reconstruction be met with a clear and detailed knowledge of the nature and extent of 'Planning,' a word which has suddenly become the chief shibboleth of the country. Again, the content and validity of Natural Law in a society which is rapidly casting off its Christianity should receive the attention of the best philosophers and theologians of the land.

All these problems in fact circle round the problem of relating the Christian religion to civil society. It is this that makes us hesitate over schemes like the Beveridge Report, which seem to be built on very unsure foundations. It is this that leads us into serious thought when public men attack the Archbishop of Canterbury with the same weapon, the 'political priest' axe, as Hitler attacks the clergy abroad. It is this that makes the future rebuilding of civilisation, taken as a whole, seem so like the child's vain activities in the nursery.

We had reason to hope, however, that those who profess to study Christian Sociology could illuminate this central problem and thus help us to make decisions on the most important issues of the day. It was on this assumption that we wrote as we did about Person and Society in the September (1942) issue of *BLACKFRIARS*. We presumed that the majority of our readers had acquired a working knowledge of the fundamental distinction of Individual and Person as frequently stated by Fr. Vann in these pages, and by M. Maritain in his books from *The Three Reformers to Scholasticism and Politics*,

But we were sadly in error, and we confess it. For D.G.P. in *Christendom* (December, 1942), a review which claims to be the only one of its kind dedicated to Christian Sociology, has attacked the very phrases that we had assumed as agreed premises. 'The individual is for the state, the state for the person,' is a statement that could mislead those unacquainted with the work of the French philosopher and the English Dominican. It has in fact so misled D.G.P. that he concludes by challenging the primacy of the personal life in the order of grace. Thus he ends his criticism by an attack on Fr. Pepler's statement in our October issue: 'Work itself if it is made consciously Christian through devotion to Christ the Worker can become creative and religious even though it be the most monotonous industrial drudgery.' This, he says, is alchemy not religion. He has evidently never heard of the aims and practices of the Jocist movement on the Continent nor of the Y.C.W. in England. Arguing from authority, then, we say that a writer in a Christian Sociological review should have acquainted himself before this with M. Maritain's and Fr. Vann's writings and with the work of the Jocist movement.

The question is of sovereign importance and no one can judge the Reports and Plans of the day in their right setting until he has settled this for himself. The issue is: Which is of prime importance, the perfection of society or the perfection of the person. Is personal holiness attainable in any state of society, or can the person only reach holiness *in* and *through* society? In the latter case inhuman, and therefore unsocial, work cannot become a means to holiness, 'creative and religious,' and the attempt to turn it into the way of the Cross which brings redemption would be alchemy. But if a life of union with God can be reached despite the unpromising conditions of society, then inhuman conditions can produce a saint, and reciprocally the saint can regenerate society, which is the ideal of Catholic Worker movements.

It all comes back to the distinction between the *Person* and the *Individual*, which D.G.P. accuses us of turning into a dichotomy, while he calls it 'a convenient fiction for specific acts of government.' To separate Person and Individual as two different things or to make the distinction into one of reason only the justification of which is purely pragmatic—a fiction for the convenience of government—both these extremes make utter nonsense of the truth. In the first case, if it were possible to consider the Person as separate from the Individual, then a man could live an utterly selfish life in all that was personal to him. The individual would be the man in the material order, his body, his purely physical actions and life in an animal

society. The ape in man would be the individual which is subordinate to society, the cog in the wheel of the State. While the really human characteristics, the soul and its faculties, separate from the ape, would be completely independent, to be served slavishly by every ape in society. Such a self-centred insistence on the person would indeed lead to the worst forms of individualism, which our assailant regards as 'the pernicious assumption' in our pages 'that personal action is never directed to social order and purpose.' That way would lead to anarchy.

If on the other hand, with D.G.P., we should make the distinction merely a convenient fiction, we are naturally led with the writer to identify life of society with life of the person, 'the person-social life,' the end and completion, apparently, of all our human endeavours. A secular society will thus place the Christian in a valley with no exit leading to salvation. 'When secular society pursues false objectives'—as in this view it is ultimately bound to do—'the whole complex of the person-social life is undermined.' Thus there is nothing for it but to found a Christian social order before you can begin to think of personal holiness. 'When persons are subjected to a false complex of living they can rarely be more than incoherently and inarticulately aware of their needs as persons (including their need for God)!' Poor Poles, poor Czechs, Yugoslavs, Greeks and Russians—is the diabolical falsity of their present social state to deprive them also of heaven! And what of those poor Christian slaves in the arenas of imperial Rome! This road leads to Hitlerism in Christian vestments. D.G.P. is too much of a Christian to follow his reasoning to its logical conclusion. Happily many social-minded Christians of to-day are equally saved by the charity of their hearts from the results of the muddle of their minds. All those who make the Social Question the primary question imply that you cannot achieve personal holiness until society has been Christianised. Such an error arises in denying the reality of the distinction of individuality and personality in man.

The distinction certainly requires thought. M. Maritain in one of his most recent essays on the subject speaks of 'the typical paradox of social life.' 'This paradox,' he continues, 'is linked to the fact that each of us is altogether an individual and altogether a person' (*Scholasticism and Politics*, chap. III, *The Human Person and Society*, pp. 71-74). There is no separation or dichotomy here; man is not 'bisected.' But the distinction is no pragmatic fiction but a reality. The person as such is a *totality*, a complete whole, while as individual he is a *part*, inferior to the completed whole of society. He must indeed work for the common good which rises superior to

his private interests, and to that extent he is necessarily implicated in society and must live socially. Indeed, having a social nature that is a law of his being. Yet the common good flows back to the man as person. 'By reason of his destination to the absolute'—Maritain states the matter lucidly—'and because he is called upon to fulfil a destiny superior to time (in other words, according to the highest exigencies of personality as such), the human person, as spiritual totality, referring to the transcendent Whole, *surpasses* all temporal societies and is superior to them. And from this point of view (in other words, as regards *the things that are not Caesar's*) it is to the perfect achievement of the person and of its supra-temporal aspirations that society itself and its common good are subordinated, as to the end of *another* order, which transcends them.'

We are slanged for making 'society and state interchangeable terms, a proceeding almost prohibitive of further discussion . . .' The need for this is shown in the whole tenor of the attack, since the only society in which the writer's remarks could be verified is the society of 'another order,' the supernatural society of the Mystical Body. It is only in and through that society that the person can gain his full being, transcending all temporal societies and organisations. With this distinction therefore we must make it quite clear that we are speaking of temporal society, the city, the state, the body politic. This does not, however, imply, as suggested by D.G.P. and his like, that by living in the unity of Christ, seeking holiness and supernatural communion, a man is withdrawn from this other society, has no responsibilities towards it. The Fathers of the Desert did, in fact, retreat when they found secular life too foul for them to be able to breathe the breath of the Spirit freely. But Miss Rosalind Murray, in replying to an attack of the same type as D.G.P.'s from Professor Stebbing, has well shown that to love God in the true ascetic spirit of otherworldliness in general impells the Christian to live a full life in this world in temporal society (*The Tablet*, Dec. 5th, 1942). 'For the Christian love of God implies love of our neighbour; souls are not saved in isolation, but it is only through our relation to God that we are able to love our neighbour fully, only through being reconciled with God, that we become "fit for life on earth" . . . It is a difference of medium, of dimension in which we live on earth and now a different kind of life; a difference in our relation and obligation, not to God only, but through him to our neighbour.'

We do not, however, sanctify ourselves *in order to* leaven society. The life of grace is primary to the Christian who seeks God above all things and thus finds his own personality and as a natural con-

sequence is in a better position to bring order into society. Individual, Society, Person, supernatural life, these are all distinct, but they do not exist as separate entities; they represent a hierarchy of values, all co-existing and exercising profound influence on one another. But first things must come first.

We have insisted on this primacy of personal holiness because unless we are quite clear about the values, the relative importance, the interconnection, of these aspects of man and society we shall be quite unable to consider as Christians these Plans and Reports like that of Sir William Beveridge. We have never assumed, as we are accused of assuming, that 'social thought and action have nothing to do with personal holiness' or vice versa. BLACKFRIARS has never been indifferent to the urgency of dealing with social thought and action. But the latter will be seriously distorted even by the Christian unless the primacy of the person and supernatural life is understood. The medieval hospitals and benevolent societies were far superior to our vast institutions to-day from the personal standpoint because they were run by those who found their own sanctification therein, who found Christ himself in the poor and the sick. Now the State and its Beveridges provide for all, order may be established in our social relations; but the personal element disappears because the primacy of the person in his union with God is not considered worthy of the attention of experts. But 'man has a strictly personal duty to preserve and bring to perfection his material and spiritual life and so attain that religious and moral purpose which God has assigned to all men. This is the supreme norm which he has set for their action, and always and in every case, and before all other duties, it retains its strictly binding force. Consequently to protect the intangible sphere of man's personal rights and to facilitate the discharge of his duties ought to be the essential task of every public authority.' Pius XII has celebrated the social encyclicals of his predecessors with such words as these (C.T.S., *Wealth, Work and Freedom*). If this is alchemy and not religion, then it would be better to burn the Gospels even before the Social Encyclicals, and to leave the children of the new paganism to continue their toy buildings.