

THE TOTALITARIAN STATE AND THE FAMILY

DAMIAN MARIE SHEEHAN, O.P.



HE Totalitarian State of today is undoubtedly one of the greatest enemies the family has ever faced. Certainly, society—or rather, the culture of a given society—has always exercised a strong influence upon the family. Witness the profound differences in family life among Catholic, Mohammedan and pagan peoples. But the modern Totalitarian State threatens the very existence of the family. If it could, it would reduce the family to a mere group of friends who have no rights whatsoever against the State. It encourages begetting children outside the married state; it decides who may marry whom; it takes the education of children completely out of the parents' hands; it encourages disloyalty to parent in its own favor without scruple.

The State bases these claims upon the contention that the State precedes the family both in nature and in establishment; that the child is born first of all a citizen of the State, and incidentally only, the member of some family. But in the words of Pope Leo XIII: “. . . since the domestic household is anterior both in idea and in fact to the gathering of men into a commonwealth, the former must necessarily have rights and duties which are prior to those of the latter, and which rest more immediately on nature.”¹

Accordingly, the two great arguments whereby we must resist the encroachments of the Totalitarians are 1) the historical, and 2) the theoretical precedence of the family over the State. What control the State may properly exercise, we shall see later on.

1) Despite the wealth of research material the social sciences are bringing to light, it is extremely difficult to trace the State back to its origins. In its forward progress, the State has not followed a single, clearly blazed trail. Rather, its path has been an obscure, many-branched affair. It has developed partly under the intelligence of man, as he tried to solve rationally the problems of living together in social environments of increasing complexity. It has developed partly independently of man, as a necessity of his social nature. It was foreshadowed faintly when men lived first together in the beginnings of the human race. It had already come of age by the time that primitive man was ready to step from pre-historic into historic times.

¹ *Rerum Novarum*.

In accounting for the mutual origins of the family and of the State, the Evolutionists hold that the earliest men and women lived in small bands, having wholly promiscuous sexual relations.² With Evolution, society or the social group came first, to evolve gradually as men progressed into the State in the political sphere, and into the family in the domestic sphere. Thus, this complete freedom in sexual relations modified itself in time into the so-called "group marriage," wherein several men and several women lived in common within the tribe. Various forms of polygamy developed, with monogamy as the final result. The future may hold some entirely new form of family life.

However, the primitive tribes which live in out of the way places in the world today are generally believed to be quite faithful in preserving for us models of how man lived in prehistoric times.³ The more primitive these tribes are, the more frequently monogamous marriages appear. Thus, unprejudiced research confirms the Biblical account: the family was originally monogamous.⁴ Further, since the first families were monogamous, and since many scientists admit that mankind arose from a single pair rather than from a group, we may claim purely scientific grounds for our contention that domestic life preceded social life, that the family preceded the State.

Turning to the Bible, we read how God said, after He had placed Adam in the Garden of Paradise, "It is not good for man to be alone: let us make him a helper like unto himself."⁵ But first, God brought all the animals before Adam that he might name them. "But for Adam," we read, "there was not found a helper like himself."⁶ The Scriptures would have us understand by this that Adam tried to befriend the animals and failed to find in them the companionship he craved.⁷ But when God brought Eve to him, Adam exclaimed, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh."⁸—She it is with whom I can have the human friendship I desire! The Inspired author then adds, "Wherefore a man shall leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife and they shall be two in one flesh."⁹ In this manner, briefly does Holy Writ recount the institution of the family—leaving implicitly to be known the essential equality of both, the

² Gillen and Blackmar, *Outlines of Sociology*, pp. 162-171.

³ Sieber and Mueller, *Social Life of Primitive Man*, Introd. p. 2-6.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 31; Schwer, *Catholic Social Theory*, pp. 220-1; Schmidt, *Primitive Revelation*, pp. 113-5.

⁵ Genesis 2: 18.

⁶ Genesis 2: 20.

⁷ Schmidt, *Primitive Revelation*, pp. 13-31; 219-21; and Index.

⁸ Genesis 2:23.

⁹ Genesis 2: 24.

spiritual as well as the carnal nature of their union, its oneness and indissolubility.

In the Garden of Paradise, food was abundant. Adam hunted and Eve gathered edible plants and berries. God's angry "... cursed is the earth in thy work; with labor and toil shalt thou eat thereof ... thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee ... in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread ..." ¹⁰ does not say that Adam turned immediately and wholly to agriculture. Certainly, hunting and the gathering of food became more difficult. Certainly, husbandry (with Cain) and shepherding (with Abel) appeared among Adam's immediate children. However, primitive man remained long predominantly a parasite upon the spontaneous offerings of nature. ¹¹ He was a wanderer, living quite literally from hand to mouth. For social and economic reasons he gathered into small, loosely knit groups of families. Custom, still mindful of the Primitive Revelation, and simple councils of the elders, exercised what governance was needed. Ties of blood were yet close; life was simple; men were normally at peace. Since both husband and wife contributed equally to the food supply, society favored the preservation of monogamy. Social obligations to the group were recognized, but political organization within the band, or with neighboring bands, was rudimentary.

This primitive stage of human culture gave birth to three distinct higher cultures: ¹²

A. *The Higher Hunters.* ¹³ By improving their methods of hunting, the men became able to procure the larger species of game in increasing abundance. Semi-permanent villages of good size became possible. In their leisure from hunting, the men developed various handicrafts. Since the men were now the chief food producers, the status of the women declined. Name, residence, property came through the father. As the unifying ties of blood grew more and more widely extended, fictional relationships of a common descent from some *totem* animal were set up. Wives never really became members of the totem clan. At puberty, boys were taken from their mothers, initiated into the tribe, and then lived together in club-houses. They became warriors and often did not marry until almost forty. The clan dominated social life, almost destroyed family life. The elders of the clan ruled the villages under a chief. Clan life pro-

¹⁰ Genesis 3: 17-19.

¹¹ Sieber and Mueller, *Social Life of Primitive Man*, pp. 21-47.

¹² *Op. cit.*, pp. 107-122.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, pp. 122-59.

moted association and organization among the men, making them tribe conscious, an important step towards the state idea.

B. *The Horticulturists*.¹⁴ In other places, the women's food gathering led to rudimentary food producing. Women learned to plant seeds and cuttings and to cultivate their garden patches with a digging stick. As the hunting of their men folk remained in the stage of smaller game, the women became the chief food producers. They owned the tools, the food they grew, and finally, the land itself. Permanent villages resulted. Name, residence, property came through the mother. Male children seldom inherited. But women lost here their golden opportunity to form a state. Instead, the maternal uncle obtained the dominance. The father became a complete nonentity and family life suffered. To end the anomaly of their position, the men developed secret societies which cut across family lines and spread out to include neighboring villages. Eventually these secret societies obtained political control, only to wither away as secret organizations. The State was not to spring from them.

C. *The Pastoral Nomads*.¹⁵ When primitive men took up their homes in the steppe regions, the men's hunting activities led instead to the domestication and breeding of huge herds. Animals were trained for riding and for dragging wagons and sleighs. The patriarch ruled with an absolute authority the extended patriarchal family, composed of his sons, and his son's sons, and their families. Name, residence, property came through the male line, usually to the first-born son. Women were highly respected as mothers and wives, but enjoyed few rights. Quarrels among the different families over pastures were settled by the patriarchs among themselves. Here again it was social conditions that determined family structure. In the attachment of poorer families to richer ones, we see the germ of feudalism. These nomads were warlike, vigorous, capable of leadership and organization. Rarely, however, did several such patriarchal families unite into political units.

Due to their proximity to each other, the male-dominated¹⁶ hunters crossed and recrossed with the female-dominated horticulturists, giving rise to a great variety of new cultures. Family life became usually a little more equally balanced. Domestication of grains, fowls, and the pig added to the food supply. Various trades flourished; surplusses induced trade; wealth accumulated; social life became more complex. The municipal town with chief, elders of the

¹⁴ *Op. cit.*, pp. 192-227.

¹⁵ *Op. cit.*, pp. 259-98.

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, pp. 331-97.

council, numerous subsidiary social organizations, was the normal result. Then, due to the melting of the great glaciers, or to overpopulation or to droughts in the steppe regions, hordes of conquering nomads fell upon the peaceful townsfolk.^{17, 18} Sometimes they destroyed everything; sometimes they remained to become the rulers of the peasant peoples. They despised these manual workers, kept aloof from them. A social hierarchy resulted which evolved in time into the deified kingship. Meanwhile, the dray animal had been harnessed to the digging stick, thus inventing the plow. Large-scale agriculture now made the growth of populous cities possible. The sedentary, peasant peoples had been sluggish. The infusion of the vigorous nomads awoke in them vast, latent powers of development. All the necessary human, cultural and economic factors were present at last to make possible the brilliant dawning of civilization that took place in the East. Thus it was that, between the years 3000 and 4000 B.C., man stepped from pre-historic into historic times in the rise of the famous sacred city states of Asia and Egypt.

2) However, priority of origin is not the chief argument of the Totalitarians. For the family loses this advantage of firstness in time if the State is really the natural supersession of the family. The family has had its day, and should give way gracefully to the State which has at last reached such a degree of perfection that it can perform all the tasks for which it had once to rely upon the family.

Now the family and the State are the only two great natural societies. That is, they are the only two which are absolutely demanded by the natural law. It may be natural enough to have all sorts of other societies and organizations, but having them or not having them remains always quite optional. Accordingly, our second argument is the priority, as a natural and necessary society, of the family over the State.

The family as a stable union of parents and children is required by strong innate and elicited inclinations of our very natures. The natural law has given us inborn attractions to those of the opposite sex, parental feelings, fraternal and sisterly affections, "instincts" implanted in our natures and demanding to be respected by us. And because of our free and rational status, we have a whole new set of feelings and inclinations which parallel on a higher level those "instincts" of family life we had no part in developing but rather to which we are obligated to conform if we would live in accordance with our natures as social beings. Such higher or elicited inclinations

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, pp. 398-404.

¹⁸ Dawson, *The Age of the Gods*, pp. 109-136; 235-57.

are the deep feelings of love that arise between husband and wife to bless their union "till death do them part"; the love of parents for the children as extensions of their own personalities, as living symbols of their mutual love;¹⁹ the love of children for their parents as having received so much in kindness from them; the attachments between brother and sister as having so much in common with each other.²⁰

Children must depend so much and so long upon others than themselves, that the duty of caring for them falls most naturally²¹ upon those who have called them into being. Thus also, children have the right to appeal first to those who gave them life. Nature knows nothing of the State as a nurse. Parents have so many physical and psychical ties with their children that it is unnatural to break the bond that lies between them.²²

For most people, the family is necessary to a life of virtue, happiness, and social utility. Truly then, the family is a most intimate community which Nature has obviously intended to be inviolable. Certainly, it is more fundamentally rooted in human nature than is the State, and hence should have priority over the State in things which pertain immediately to family life.

The State becomes a natural necessity when numbers of men live together. Communist dreams of eventual Elysian anarchy are the imaginings of their own particular brand of opium. Men in numbers together need protection from themselves. They need authority and organization to point their energies into co-operative undertakings for the common good. They need unity to protect themselves from outside enemies. The State flows not alone from the innate inclination of man to self-protection, but also from the natural desire to live the better life. For it is only through the State that he may have both. That is why man has been given by God natural aptitudes for authority and for submission to authority, for association and for organization in the political sphere.

However, the State does take a certain precedence over the family insofar as the State alone is a perfect society. A perfect society is one which has within itself all the means necessary for attaining its purpose. It is wholly self-contained²³ and self-sufficient. Therefore, it is wholly independent of any other society. The State is a perfect society because its purpose, the material happiness of all its citizens,

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. VIII, Ch. 14; St. Thomas, *Commentary on the Ethics*.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ Cronin, *Science of Ethics*, pp. 393-400.

²² *Summa Theol.* II, IIae, q. 10, a. 12.

²³ Cronin, *Science of Ethics*.

is the highest possible purpose for a natural society, and because it has at its command all the requirements for attaining its end. It is unlimited from above by being subordinated to no other natural society. Yet it finds its perfection also in being limited from below by the respect it owes to the rights of those lesser societies, such as the family, which are incorporated within its boundaries.

Absolutely speaking, the family, too, is a perfect society. It has within itself all that is required for the birth and rearing of children. Otherwise, the race could not have begun from a single pair. Otherwise, families could not go out as they do, pioneering into the wilderness. But, out of its own resources, the family can supply only that which is barely necessary for life. It needs the assistance of others for living the "better life." And it is as incapable of supplying this "better life" that we call the family an imperfect society. Accordingly, for the protection and for the fuller perfection of its members, the family is dependent upon the State.

A second reason why the State takes a precedence over the family is due to the fact that the family is not only a private but also a public society. In its purely private affairs the family is obviously wholly inviolate, because such matters concern no one else outside the family circle. But insofar as its members are also citizens of the State, insofar as the family has the public function of begetting and rearing citizens for the State, the family falls under the jurisdiction of the State. For it is in the family that the rights of property and dignity of person, loyalty and co-operation, religion and culture, and all the social arts and virtues are learned in large measures. Should family decay, so too would the State.

Accordingly, the State has the right and the duty to foster, to support, to supplement the family. It has the task of coming to the aid of the family, but only *as often as* and only *insofar as* the family is not fulfilling or cannot fulfill its social obligations. Hence the State may not arbitrarily interfere with the family, nor try to substitute its own for paternal authority. Hence the action of the State is limited, on the one hand, by the insufficiency of the family, and, on the other hand, by its natural sufficiency.

Space forbids the working out of these general principles in their interesting details. Correct conclusions from these general principles, however, will not be matters of mere speculative pleasure; put into practice, they will concretely and favorably affect the lives of every man. Neglect of these principles will lead and has led to man's being in a sorry plight.